Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment

Ricarda Wagner, Christine Neufeld, Ludger Lieb

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WRITING BEYOND PEN AND PARCHMENT

INSCRIBED OBJECTS IN MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN LITERATURE

Edited by Ricarda Wagner, Christine Neufeld, and Ludger Lieb

MATERIALE TEXTKULTUREN

Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment

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Introduction

When Marshall McLuhan wrote *The Gutenberg Galaxy* in 1962, he argued that the invention of print—and with it mass communication—changed not only society, but human consciousness itself. McLuhan's predictions were eerily prescient: with text-generating devices never far from our fingers, and advertising campaigns conquering even the sanctuary of our lavatory cubicles, we contend daily with what it means to live in a text-saturated world. But what of the time before print, the Middle Ages, when most of society could neither read nor write? What kind of work does writing do in a non-typographical society, a society without the mechanical means to mass-produce texts? For the medievalist this question involves looking not only at manuscript culture but also at other kinds of text-bearing artefacts in the Middle Ages to understand the role of writing in medieval society. For a literature scholar in particular, this means asking, what can stories of magical inscribed rings or prophetic writing on walls tell us about how writing was perceived before print transformed this world?

Archaeological studies have brought to light a great number of medieval artefacts that bear writing. In addition to codices and single sheets of parchment or paper, objects like swords, rings, tombstones, crosses, and clothing were also used to transmit texts both poetic and mundane. These inscriptions might range in length from single words (a craftman's name on a candleholder, for example) to longer compositions in verse, as on the monumental Ruthwell Cross. We may find these text-bearing artefacts preserved in museums and can also encounter them in the literature of the Middle Ages. An inscribed sword-hilt in *Beowulf* tells the story of how a race of giants perished from the earth. In some version of the Arthurian legend, the Grail displays the written word of God, and the ominous warning on the gate to Hell in Dante's *Divina Commedia* continues to fascinate readers.

Rather than adding to the excellent work that has been done on actual text-bearing artefacts from the Middle Ages, this book focuses on "narrated inscriptions", that is, inscriptions imagined in medieval European literatures. By "inscription" we mean all writing whose material differs from the medieval standard of ink

and parchment or paper. A prototypical inscription, such as a stone epitaph, is incised, its letters formed by scraping off the material surface of an artefact. But this volume also considers additive inscriptions, in which a text is affixed to a surface, as in the case of a leather belt beset with gems spelling a word.

Narrated inscriptions as opposed to physical ones allow us to explore different perspectives on the powers of the written word in the Middle Ages. By looking at literary accounts, we may uncover not only medieval *practices* of textuality, but also medieval conceptualisations of extraordinary forms of writing. Since fictional events are not necessarily committed to the laws of physics, narrated inscriptions may provide us with fresh insights into the imaginative and sometimes fantastical potential and boundaries of writing itself. The marked presence of material writing in a literary text also challenges us to examine the issues of metatextuality. As several of the chapters in this volume argue, fictional inscriptions interrupt the process of narration and reveal what it means to be a reader of both texts and things.

This duality of a world marked by linguistic abstractions and tangible objects actually lay at the heart of the emerging discipline of medieval studies in the nineteenth century. One of the first Germanists, Jacob Grimm (1785–1863), understood philology as an encompassing endeavour that attends to both words and things. While some philologists preferred to explore medieval texts in order to chart linguistic developments, others chose to analyse the literary remains of the Middle Ages in order to reconstruct the culture and imagination of the past. Such reconstructions also included studies of medieval materiality, as evidenced by the work of another pioneer in medieval German studies, Friedrich Panzer (1870–1956). His fascination with the Middle Ages oscillated between a philologist's love of the written word and an archaeologist's desire to be among the material remnants of a bygone age, culminating in a monumental project to collect all existing medieval inscriptions in the German language. As objects of study that perfectly amalgamate textuality and thingness, inscriptions, Panzer argued, provide a unique window into medieval literary and material culture.[1]

While Panzer very much wished for inscriptions narrated by literary texts to be included in the collection he initiated, the task fell to later scholars. Nikolaus Henkel was the first to present a compilation entirely dedicated to narrated inscriptions, focusing mainly on texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He concluded that epitaphs and other engravings found only in imaginative texts may reveal something about medieval attitudes

to the written word, but are indebted to literary traditions rather than based on actual material practices.[2] Ulrich Ernst added a number of French examples to Henkel's German catalogue and analysed narrated inscriptions in conjunction with other forms of writing in medieval literature, most notably letters.[3]

Both Henkel and Ernst were concerned with the textual side of inscriptions. Investigating the inscription's place in a book culture that constantly developed genres and literary formulas, both studies address a number of issues that are also fundamentally important for this volume. First, narrated inscriptions may be explored with an eye to their content and linguistic appearance: what are they about? How long are the engraved texts? What languages are they written in? Are the text-bearing artefacts and their inscriptions cited ekphrastically or only mentioned in passing? Which conventions of genre and rhetoric determine their setting? Which communicative functions (appellative, declarative, prophetic, etc.) do they serve? Second, narrated inscriptions provoke us to consider their metatextual relationships to the texts that narrate them: how are text-bearing artefacts embedded in the flow of a narrative plot? How and why do individual texts employ inscriptions to highlight questions of literary reception and performance?

This volume desires to do more than merely supplement Henkel and Ernst's Germanist collections with a European perspective. We also aim to expand the focus of the inquiry to include not only the textual, but also the physical side of narrated inscriptions. Rather than reading epitaphs, tattoos and engraved rings only as texts-within-a-text, we explore them as material artefacts as well and reveal what happens when writing, so reliant on abstract signifiers, is reified. Such an endeavour sits well with current approaches in material cultures studies. Scholars like the sociologist Bruno Latour, the archaeologist Ian Hodder and the political philosopher Jane Bennett, to name but a few, have convincingly shown that not only social relations between humans, but also between material things and materiality, form a crucial part of cultural dynamics. In order to explore this tenet, we propose to reconstruct a medieval "discourse of inscriptionality" that brings together conceptions of text and writing, physical matter, space, and the interplay between humans and things. The chapters of this volume approach these questions by focusing on three points in particular:

Materials and Materiality

Exploring the material side of writing challenges us to rethink the boundary dividing humans and things. Since Antiquity, our inquiries into the natural world have divided matter into two opposing types, organic and inorganic. This dichotomy was sustained by what came to be known as "vitalism", the belief that organic matter differs from inorganic matter because it is saturated with a life force of some kind. While vitalism has fallen into disrepute, modern chemistry still retains the distinction between organic matter, typically carbon-based and associated with living organisms, and inorganic matter, that is, everything else. A number of experiments have exposed the inconsistencies of this classification: organic matter may in fact be created from inorganic substances, and not all material generally classed as organic is part of the life cycle of animate beings.[4] However, this dualism of matter, while erroneous, has helped to sustain the notion that agency is exclusive to animate beings. Entities composed of organic matter, most notably animals and humans, harness inorganic matter in the form of minerals, stones and computer chips. Inorganic matter, in turn, merely exists to be used, but does not possess any agency of its own.

What if, instead of entrenching an ontological difference between animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic matter, we simply investigated the "materiality" of this world? For Lynn Meskell, this means engaging in "the exploration of the situated experiences of material life, the constitution of the object world and concomitantly its shaping of human experience".[5] Jane Bennett goes one step further and proposes to decentralise human experience by not looking *at* material things, but by reading ourselves *as* physical entities sharing materialities with other entities and forces. Drawing on Spinoza among others, she posits "a power present in *every* body", a "thing-power or vibrant matter" which demands that we attune our perception to nonhuman agencies as well. A power outage, for example, cannot merely be traced back to human error, but must be understood as a disruption in a network that links nuclear waste, cooling water, conductive metal, electrons, utility poles and consumers.[6]

For literary scholars, attending to this idea of vibrant matter means investigating text passages that narrate the material encounters between humans and things. With this volume, we aim to explore the meanings medieval cultures assigned to specific materials marked by human writing, and what meanings inscriptions' materiality assigned to human writing. What does

writing on gold signify, as opposed to writing on fish bones? Does weaving words in textiles differ from writing in blood? How do the human actors in the narratives perceive the materiality of the inscriptions that surround them?[7] And do the texts tell of a specific "thing-power" inherent in material writing? Considering inscriptions as material entities also allows us to critically evaluate the distinctions we assume between humans and things. Generally, the faculty of speech is considered an exclusively human characteristic. But text-bearing artefacts, inscribed as they are with speech, are anthropomorphised in ways that potentially subvert their thingness. By materialising the human faculty of speech, inscriptions invite us to explore what exactly, if anything, separates human-power from thing-power.

Topology and Mobility

Both humans and things are material forms that exist in spatial relationships that both construct and define them. Their materialities exist in topological relation to other materialities. As we can only perceive space via the distances between material bodies, topology can be understood as a network extending between the human entities, thingly entities and their physical surroundings. Such ties in space bind material bodies together and form what Deleuze and Guattari have called "assemblages". While they use the term to refer to various juxtapositions of heterogeneous components as abstract as linguistic signs and semiotic meanings, Bennett re-interprets assemblages to mean the "ad hoc groupings"[8] of multiple material elements such as humans and things.[9] As we see in Michael R. Ott's chapter on weapons, the medieval concept of the knight does not refer to a single human figure, but to a material assemblage combining a man, a horse, and war-gear.

In such assemblages, the agency is not located with any one entity, but distributed among all elements that are topologically associated with one another. In the case of a relic enclosed in a reliquary that is touched and kissed by believers, for example, holiness is diffused among various material things and the absent saint, while human actors strive to partake in this sacred agency. Our topological inquiries in this volume examine how text-bearing artefacts create or become part of material assemblages. We wish to explore convergences of humans, things and writing and the agency distributed within these epigraphic assemblages. If, as Seeta Chaganti has argued, inscriptions stand out as distinct

figures against the receding ground they are engraved in, how does the exact spatial positioning of text impact its perception and function?[10] How does being arrested by an epitaph at one's feet differ, for instance, from the inscription that defines the threshold one crosses when passing through a gate?

Another aspect of topology has to do with movement through space. Are these assemblages fixed to one place or are the inscriptions mobile, joining new assemblages as they travel? Text-bearing artefacts can be either locostatic or locomobile.[11] The position of locostatic inscriptions such as writing on tombstones, stelae, milestones and parts of buildings is permanent, allowing assemblages to develop around them. Their distributive agency can transform spatial arrangements into places of memory, history, spirituality and community. Locomobile artefacts, in contrast, travel.[12] Inscribed weapons and jewellery are worn on the human body, creating close material assemblages between human, thing and text. Engraved artefacts that may be picked up, lost, or passed on invite us to consider the connections between material ownership, identity and agency.

Topological arrangements also determine how accessible an inscription may be. Since they represent materialised information, script-bearing artefacts are entangled with issues of publicity and privacy. Locostatic inscriptions marking public places often aim to address a larger audience over a longer course of time, multiplying the possibilities for reception and communication. While their materiality makes most locostatic inscriptions easily available, other text-bearing artefacts are configured for closed and predetermined assemblages only, whose rupture renders them enigmatic. Investigating the topology and mobility of material writing, then, also leads to questions of community and the actions its members perform on and with inscribed things.

Practices

Assemblages between humans and artefacts are not only defined by states; topological proximity is not the only thing that binds material bodies together. Rather, humans and artefacts are connected through a series of actions which, when repeated and developed into routine, may become practices. When exploring inscriptions, the most relevant practices are those of reading and writing, categories understood broadly to include chiselling, engraving, embroidering, painting, etc. on the one side, and,

deciphering, copying, memorising, glossing, quoting, translating on the other. To read an inscription may also be an act of iconographic interpretation as texts can also function as images. Even an illiterate person could recognise an assertion of the presence of the divine word in the golden script adorning the apex of a cathedral's apse, for instance. In addition to processes of creation and reception, epigraphic assemblages may encompass religious and magical practices such as cursing, blessing, healing and commemoration. Text-bearing artefacts that may be touched, handled and destroyed illustrate what can be done with writing once it becomes embodied in a material form.

In fact, it may be the thingly nature of text-bearing artefacts that invites humans to perform cultural practices on and with them. Like other material objects, inscriptions display "affordance", that is, the ability to provoke actions.[13] While this may be a property of all material bodies, artefacts that bear text and hence initiate communication are particularly affordant. The famous inscription on the sword in the stone of Arthurian legend challenges the viewer to test his fate by grasping its handle; an engraved talisman incites the individual to wear it in order to enjoy its protection. Assemblages of humans and material things, then, encompass the needs of both parties, as human responses to thingly provocations help move objects along their own trajectories. Rather than thinking of practices as unilateral human performances on passive objects, this volume explores the thingly affordances that create and maintain epigraphic habits.

Cultural practices are subject to modification, of course. Alternatives to established routines may develop, favouring a new kind of writing material, for example, over the old standard. In literary texts, such a deviation may result from an individual choice or a change in conditions, and may be explained or commented on as well as ignored. Sir Gareth's inscribed golden helmet in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, for instance, is remarkable when all other weaponry in the same text is made of metal, a material that bears writing equally well, is less costly to acquire, and offers much better actual protection. Some artefacts such as wax tablets or gravestones are specifically fashioned to be inscribed; for other things being written on incorporates them into practices usually reserved for different kinds of artefacts. A lance engraved with the name of God, for example, overlays the practices of fighting and prayer, generating interferences worth investigating.

While an inscribed sword functions simultaneously as both war-gear and text-bearer, other artefacts turn into palimpsests

when they are written on. The text they come to bear suspends their previous functions as blank things and reconfigures the relations within their material assemblages. We see this, for example, in Gahmuret's magnificent helmet cut entirely from a diamond in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. After Gahmuret's death, the helmet is inscribed with an extensive epitaph and placed on the hero's grave in a memorial assemblage that also includes his now equally defunct sword. Thus, the engraved helmet once worn close to the questing knight's body is now transformed from defensive tool into an articulate witness to Gahmuret's heroism long after the man himself has vanished.

Inscriptions may also repurpose an artefact repeatedly over a longer stretch of time. An inscribed artefact which is recycled, as it were, enters new assemblages, serves additional purposes, incites further actions, and takes on new meanings; it acquires a biography.[14] One common example of such repurposing in the Middle Ages is the *spolium*, which Denis Ferhatović defines as "a significant artifact that complicates the boundary between temporal layers, natural elements, global and local, textual and visual, and animate and inanimate forces".[15] In architecture, the appropriation and redeployment of another society's prestige objects, often signalled by their inscribed nature, is a way of asserting one's own ascendancy, either through military conquest (as one might see on the Iberian peninsula) or cultural supercession (as with the Christian use of classical inscriptions in medieval Rome).

Humans, then, are not the only entities in material assemblages whose life-stories are interwoven with practices of writing. While the objects that have come down to us from the Middle Ages reveal clues as to which materials were favoured, medieval texts allow us to observe how artefacts were created, refashioned, handled, perceived and recast with the help of inscriptions. By exploring not only epigraphic materiality, but also the practices around text-bearing artefacts, we gain fresh insights into the entanglements of humans and things in assemblages that encompass dynamic actions as much as fixed states, and imagined potentialities along with practical uses.[16]

For our study on medieval epigraphic materialities, topologies and practices, we draw on a corpus of narrated inscriptions collected at the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC 933) "Material Text Cultures" at Heidelberg University since 2011. Collaborators in the subproject "Inscriptionality" first catalogued narrated inscriptions in German medieval texts. Additional funding

recruited experts in other literary traditions to extend the scope of the collection to include Old Norse, Old English, Middle English, and some Latin. As of March 2019, the open-access database covers about 250 texts and their text-bearing artefacts, ranging from the early Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, and is searchable by object, material, title or literary genre.[17] This volume is an evolution of the database's initiative, placing narrated inscriptions from Old French, medieval Iberian and Italian literary contexts alongside the initial Germanic corpus.

Our volume offers a series of readings that interpret a collection of narrated inscriptions from across what we now would broadly call medieval European literature. As inscriptions are an intersection of the material and the textual, the comparative scope of our study reveals significant cultural and regional differences in medieval attitudes to writing and thingness. In regions where monastic literacy prevailed, sheets of parchment were the main material for all sorts of writing. In early medieval Scandinavia, in contrast, wooden sticks engraved with runes were the medium of choice for everyday communication, and were remembered in literary texts long after the advent of Christianity and its distinct materiality.

The first part of this volume initiates our comparative project along the familiar lines of traditional national philologies, offering one chapter each on narrated inscriptions in medieval German, Old Norse, British, French, Italian and Iberian literatures. These chapters aim to throw into relief the idiosyncrasies of each literary culture with regard to materialities and writing practices. In this part of the volume, we have confined ourselves to vernacular literatures. Attitudes to the material, we hold, are particularly intertwined with the geographical conditions a culture has to contend with. As the Latin language functions as a medieval *lingua franca* that transcends the territories covered by different vernaculars, inscriptions narrated by Latin texts are incorporated into the appropriate chapters of the second part.

Nevertheless, even as the first half of this volume works within the conventional limits of different philologies, individual contributions trouble the uniformity of medieval societies assumed by nineteenth-century nationalism. Modern national and linguistic borders do not always translate well to the map of medieval Europe onto which they were retrojected by the national need for a coherent historical narrative. The phantom of linguistic homogeneity has long obscured the presence of Celtic literature, for instance, in the creation of a medieval English

literary tradition. Likewise, Anglo-Norman texts, fundamental to an emerging Insular literary corpus, tend to fall under the purview of French studies. The Iberian Peninsula with its multilingual and multicultural complexities provides another striking example. Literary texts from this region have survived in Old Castilian (Old Spanish), Old Provençal (Old Occitan), Galician-Portuguese (Old Portuguese) as well as Arabic and Hebrew, which means that Stephanie Béreiziat-Lang's chapter on the text-bearing artefacts of the medieval Iberia cannot presume to speak for simply a "Spanish tradition". This collection intentionally includes bodies of literature from regions that have, until recently, been excluded from discussions of medieval European culture because of their positions on the peripheries of Latin Christendom. Cultural contact zones like the Iberian peninsula offer opportunities to interrogate the boundaries between East and West as they pertain to material culture.

Our collection not only delineates these borders, but also reveals them to be permeable. Both objects and stories travel with migrants, individuals and entire peoples, with merchants, minstrels, soldiers and refugees of war—with little regard for the borders that are now being dangerously fetishised in popular and political discourse. Long-distance exchanges of texts accompanied the colonial encounters of the Crusades, for example, and enabled the academic endeavours pursued by scholars and students moving between different scholarly centres that profited profoundly from the knowledge produced by Muslim scholars. Most significantly, the area we conventionally call medieval Europe is connected by dense interpersonal networks, both monastic and aristocratic. Men and women of the church, some place-bound, others wandering, share an ever-growing corpus of religious texts whose provenance in some cases lay far beyond the eastern borders of Roman Christianity.

Moveable texts did not simply travel, however. In the process of transmission, they were changed and adapted to relate more closely to the new context that received them. *Translatio* also denoted a "non-textual, non-linguistic transfer",[18] one of political power and of knowledge (*translatio imperii et studii*). Medieval translations, then, are not only linguistic and philological enterprises, but cultural practices. They establish contact and negotiate seemingly foreign complexities; they bridge the gap not only between languages, but also between distinct or overlapping cultural zones and their materialities. By exploring the transformations script-bearing artefacts undergo as they move from text to text, we analyse the idiosyncratic nuances that

medieval linguistic and literary cultures attached to their own understanding of the written word and its powers. How do divergent material conditions of textuality, real and fantastical, vary across different regions, languages and alphabets? Do inscriptions represent a particular challenge for translation since they are second-order texts, that is: texts within a text? What difference does it make if an inscription is transformed from a Latin source or a vernacular narrative? Translating the romance of Alexander, for example, involves more than rendering the plot into another language. As several versions of the text feature intriguing narrated inscriptions on buildings, it also means translating a particular concept of material writing indigenous to Greco-Roman cities into Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian contexts, for instance, which lacked a literate urban public.

The second half of this volume takes its cue from these shared, travelling objects to explore perspectives on medieval culture whose categories are material rather than philological. These chapters, based on the research done by experts of different literary traditions, and developed in consultation with one another, focus on the materiality and thingliness of inscriptions in a multilingual selection of assemblages. We explore different types of text-bearing objects such as architectural elements, textiles, tombs, weapons, jewellery, and tablets. We also examine what meanings raw materials like bodies and skin, wood and stone may take on when inscribed, and how they contribute to the meaning of the inscriptions they bear. Several of these contributions specifically attend to text-bearing objects that have travelled between different literary traditions. The chapter on "Wood" by Michael R. Ott juxtaposes the ligneous inscriptions in Gottfried von Straßburg and Marie de France's Tristan narratives, while the chapter on "Tablets" by Ricarda Wagner contrasts the waxen *écriture féminine* in the German and French versions of the *Eneas* romance.

Our methodological intervention in comparative literary analysis has certainly introduced some interesting challenges and discoveries. The ambition of a project that brings so many different scholars from diverse philological backgrounds together soon reveals that even as we now share an object of study, the ways in which we encounter the artefact and articulate our insights are informed by distinct disciplinary backgrounds. Consequently, this volume is also an experiment in collaborative scholarship which occasionally illustrates the different persuasive and deductive rhetorical strategies deployed in Anglophone, Italian, and German literary scholarship. The task of

categorising text-bearing objects for the database also on occasion helped us to discover distinctive features in our own literary traditions. For example, the speaking objects of the Anglo-Saxon riddles emerge from Scandinavian skaldic poetry while also frequently drawing on a Latin Christian tradition shared with the Continent; and yet they are a genre unique to England. It stood to reason, then, that as we expanded our comparative scope for the volume, other contributors would also stumble across puzzling artefacts and literary contexts that both defied expectations and confounded simple categorisation.

Neither a familiarity with historical inscriptions nor a knowledge of uniquely literary devices could help us anticipate some of the artefacts we found. Because they do not fit neatly into the ideological boxes that serve to organise standard practices of medieval inscription, these artefacts focus our attention particularly on the meta-textual questions their material textuality raises. Thus, taking a cue from Renaissance collectors, those connoisseurs of thingliness, whose most extraordinary treasures were set aside to contemplate in Cabinets of Curiosities or *Wunderkammern*, this volume concludes with a collection of extraordinary text-bearing objects selected by contributors for the questions they raise.

A Cabinet of Curiosities is built from wonders, on a sense of awe at what things there are in the world. But it also evokes desire, the impetus to collect more items, to fill the gaps and assemble a more detailed multitude. This volume, too, aims to inspire further questions and collaborations. The immensity of the Latin and Old French literary traditions means we have only just scratched the surface of what they have to teach us about narrated inscriptions. There is still much to be gained, we believe, from placing into conversation Muslim, Jewish and Christian traditions, as material writing had a very particular role to play for those the Quran terms the People of the Book. Likewise, we hope that subsequent studies of narrated inscriptions will be able to focus more microscopically on literary languages frequently overlooked by national studies, such as Irish and Welsh. Furthermore, studies which explore on a macroscopic level, narrated inscriptions in languages, such as Greek and Arabic, which were used across diverse regions offer the potential to investigate the intersections of material writing and empire.

A further line of inquiry would ideally move beyond the Eurocentrism of the present volume to attend to text-bearing artefacts in premodern African as well as East and Southeast Asian cultures, for example. The global perspective of the CRC 933

at Heidelberg University has shown that studies on material writing in ancient Mesopotamia, the early Chinese Empire and present-day Bali challenge us to think harder about the cultural conditions we have grown accustomed to expect of medieval Europe. If, as we noted, medieval studies began with a fascination for words and things, a re-engagement with the material conditions of medieval writing offers a way of shifting the conversations possible in our field. The multilingual, multicultural and transregional perspective on the "European" Middle Ages in this volume, then, is not only a contribution to the study of writing in non-typographical societies, but an intervention in how we conduct the discipline of medieval studies itself.

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Literary Inscriptions Across Europe

Laura Velte and Michael R. Ott

Writing Between Stillness and Movement: Script-Bearing Artefacts in Courtly German Literature

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1Literary Contexts

In the German-speaking medieval world, narrated inscriptions and extraordinary forms of writing occur with noticeable frequency in secular narrative poetry. During the High Middle Ages, this vernacular art of storytelling stretches across a network of well-established and well-connected aristocratic courts. Most of the Middle High German poetic texts were translated, re-told, written, copied, and performed in these contexts. Courtly literature flourished from the late twelfth century onwards before losing ground during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Interestingly, the invention of movable type in the middle of the fifteenth century became a barrier courtly literature rarely passed. Courtly texts that were still deemed important after 1450 continued to be copied by hand, revealing their antiquity via their material presentation. Later, during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, these manuscripts were largely (though not completely) forgotten. It is to the credit of Romanticism and early “Germanic Studies” (*Germanistik*) that the narrative culture from the twelfth to the fourteenth century was finally transposed into print culture and popularised again.

Courtly literature’s appearance and long-lasting success was mainly due to far-reaching social and political transformations in the High Middle Ages. These transformations led to the growing interest of (presumably) scarcely educated noblemen and noblewomen in various forms of writing that facilitated administration and governance. This interest likely led, in turn, to the increasing importance of script and writing within the story-

worlds themselves. Consequently, narrated inscriptions and extraordinary forms of writing offer us a chance to think about the role, the scope, and the limitations of this once innovative and influential technique called writing. To put it plainly: when courtly literature deals with extraordinary forms of writing, it also deals with a comparatively novel and fascinating phenomenon—a phenomenon whose potentials and boundaries were not yet clear.

Admittedly, there is another reason why, for the German nobility, the advent of courtly literature was of tremendous importance. Courtly literature allowed German nobles to participate in a kind of self-fashioning through textual culture; it helped shape a shared code of conduct, and it ultimately enabled the German nobility to strengthen its position vis a vis the Church. For many centuries, the Church had not only administered Christian knowledge and faith but also jealously guarded classical secular knowledge by firmly controlling the written discourse network. In the course of the twelfth century, however, the Church lost its educational monopoly. Numerous dukes and princes now began to support the arts and sciences at their local courts, in competition with the imperial court, the only secular body traditionally responsible for the promotion of (Latin-based) education. In these new courtly contexts the development of chancelleries encouraged new forms of administration with a consequent increase in Latin writing. This enabled princes and dukes to emerge as patrons for art and vernacular literature by using the potential of textual production to put relevant narratives down in writing. In doing so, these princes and dukes managed to gradually establish a distinct culture that was vernacular, courtly and, in many ways, textual.

France was the main source for this courtly culture and initially its most important model. In fact, German epic poetry of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries is largely based on three thematic cycles taken from contemporary French literature. These cycles focus on legendary historical periods: the Matter of Rome features tales from ancient epics, like the Trojan War, the life and deeds of Alexander and the wanderings of Aeneas. The Matter of France comprises the legends of Charlemagne and Roland, for example; and the Matter of Britain focuses especially on legendary material associated with King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Due to this orientation towards France, many accounts of script in German literature have their origins in French and Occitan literary culture. This does not mean that German

narratives merely copy their French sources. The “re-told” narratives—far from being translations in a contemporary sense—were adjusted to meet the expectations and knowledge of a particular audience.[19] Well up to the fourteenth century, this audience generally was composed of mostly illiterate noble laymen and women at regional courts. Eventually, from the fourteenth century onwards, the cities (especially the imperial cities) became more and more important as places for the production, reception and transmission of texts and stories, which again changed the topics, forms and the dissemination of vernacular literature.

These changes significantly affected the interest in writing and manuscript culture and, in turn, the representation of writing in literary story-worlds. Prose romances (*Prosaromane*), for instance, provided a new form, which helped to gradually transform literary aesthetics and to establish new topics more relevant to the interests and concerns of townspeople. In these *Prosaromane* writing is often depicted as a rather ordinary act of communication and of managing everyday life. Romances in prose became more and more common during the fifteenth century and flourished during the following century. Finally, in the seventeenth century, the new and fashionable genre of pastoral poetry featured numerous inscriptions on trees and wood, a material that was, as the corresponding article in this volume explains, hardly used for writing in medieval times. Established in the twelfth century, the German tradition of narrated inscriptions and extraordinary forms of writing came to an end almost five hundred years later.

2Narrated Inscriptions

Our discussion of narrated inscriptions as extraordinary forms of writing will focus on courtly literature and consequently on the period from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. We will not cover all genres, however, because not all genres engage significantly with script-bearing artefacts. Lyric poetry, for instance, seldom contains discussions or descriptions of writing. This might be due to lyric poetry’s profound connection to live performance and orality. One important and illuminating exception which proves the rule, a love-song by Heinrich von Morungen, will be our first example. Heroic poetry (*Heldenepik*) is likewise primarily engaged with oral communication. Heroic poems like those featuring Theoderic the Great (*Dietrichepik*) and even the rather

courtly *Nibelungenlied* demonstrate a rather conspicuous disregard for script and writing, preferring messengers to letters and oaths to charters. As interesting as this may be, we will omit heroic poetry and instead cover narrative texts, especially romances and various shorter narratives. The longer narratives include Arthurian romances like Hartmann von Aue's *Erec*, adaptations of French *Chansons de Geste* like the accounts of Roland and William of Gellone, and Gottfried von Straßburg's version of *Tristan and Iseult*. While some of the script-bearing artefacts in these texts are mentioned only in passing, others, like the grail in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, play a major role and reveal what is at stake with writing beyond pen and parchment.

A considerable number of inscriptions in courtly literature are fanciful and highly symbolic. They can be very long, extremely valuable, elaborately manufactured, or even magical. Although narrative worlds contain many different things (including the fantastical or magical), there is, as a matter of principle, no need to explain where these artefacts came from or how they were produced. Rather, German medieval narrations instead show a profound interest in detailed descriptions of the things themselves. Narrators do not just guide their recipients through the story, but invite them to *look* closely at the prepared artefacts of the imaginary world. Ekphrasis—or *descriptio*, as this rhetorical technique was called in the Middle Ages—is adapted from ancient epic. It reserves a space inside the narrative to reflect on materiality, focussing not on production but on the extremely artful nature and texture of artefacts.[20] Inscribed tombs especially invite an ekphrastic focus that highlights not so much the engraved texts, which tend to be short and formulaic, but brings out the ornamental shape and extraordinary material of the artefact.[21] Such elaborately worked inscriptions engage the senses of sight and touch first before inviting the onlooker to process them cognitively, through reading and interpretation.

Our interest in narrated inscriptions in German courtly literature has some scholarly predecessors, as this volume's introduction has pointed out, but our comprehensive approach does not. Previous studies mostly tried to register and arrange collected text passages and to compare the findings to real inscriptions. We will instead consider script-bearing artefacts as an independent phenomenon not necessarily linked to real artefacts. Moreover, we propose to treat narrated inscriptions as starting points for readings of the particular text and as clues to medieval engagements with script and writing.[22] In choosing our

examples we rely on the CRC database and the collection it provides. We have already (as of October 2018) catalogued 95 relevant German works up to the year 1500. And from these 95 works we collected 195 relevant passages, some of which include several script-bearing artefacts. The database entry on Wolfram von Eschenbach's romance *Parzival*, for example, lists an astonishingly high number of 11 text passages featuring inscribed objects, although the number of artefacts is in fact less because some artefacts are mentioned repeatedly.[23] In contrast, Wolfram's epic poem *Willehalm* offers only three passages. The first one simply refers to an epitaph found in *Parzival*; the second one mentions a cross attached to a garment that resembles the Greek letter *tau*. The third and most interesting one refers to name tags that identify dead heathen kings and attributes the practice of material writing to cultural "others". This difference in the treatment of inscriptions in works by the same author highlights the significance of generic distinctions, demonstrating that epic poetry and similar texts only sporadically include script-bearing artefacts.

Objects of the literary worlds appear primarily as "artefacts". This is to say that things like clothes, brooches, weapons and tombs are manufactured and shaped by human or divine artistry. We can distinguish between materials used for writing and materials serving as a ground and surface for writing. Materials mentioned in German medieval literature often reflect a courtly desire for representative artwork employing precious materials such as gold, various metals, diamonds, textiles and glass, and natural materials such as stone and wood. Narrations of script-bearing artefacts, however, do not always provide information about their specific materials or about the specific script they bear, or about the writing technique. Even so, our database indicates that text-bearing artefacts in medieval German literature most often consist of metal (43 instances), textile (37), stone (27), gems (10) and wood (5). The most common writing materials applied to a surface are gold (34 instances) and gems (7). As both materials are very precious, they bind the concept of writing to aristocratic opulence. Epitaphs are mostly said to be *ergraben*, a term commonly used in Middle High German to indicate carving, engraving, and chiselling. Writings on textiles are sometimes described as woven. In many other cases, however, the texts do not elaborate on writing techniques.

Our examples are organised according to two important and closely connected criteria: location and movement. We will discuss "locostatic" artefacts first to show how these artefacts

create relationships to the past and to earlier texts (part 3). We then deal with tents as a rather special case, in that they create third spaces, spaces closely connected to (courtly) love (part 4). Finally, we will discuss "locomobile" artefacts (part 5). These artefacts mediate and bridge a distance—between lovers, for example, or between separated family members. In short: We speak about media relating to the past (locostatic), media relating to space (tents) and media relating to people (locomobile). A concluding section (part 6) enlists some recent scholarship by the CRC subproject C05 and reflects on its relationship to previous German collections of narrated inscriptions.

3Locostatic Artefacts

"Has anyone seen the lady", the speaker in one of Heinrich von Morungen's poems wonders, "the lady we may usually observe while she is standing at the window?" (*Sach ieman die vrouwen*, / *die man mac schouwen* / *in dem venster stân?*, 129,14)[24] It is she, the speaker claims, who once took away his sorrow with her resplendence, shining like the sun on a bright early morning. Now that she is gone, the speaker asks his audience for help, searching for someone who still has his wits about him. He should seek her, go to her, beg her to come back to console the speaker before he dies because "pleasure and pain", he says, will soon take him to his grave.[25] The speaker asks for a last favour:

Wan sol schrîben kleine	Someone shall write, with small letters,
reht ûf dem steine,	right onto the stone,
der mîn grap bevât,	which will cover my grave;
wie liep sî mir waere	shall write how much I loved her
und ich ir unmaere;	and that she despised me.
swer danne über mich gât,	Whoever will walk above me
Daz der lese dise nôt	shall read this misery
und ir gewinne künde,	and find out about
der vil grôzen sünde,	the great sin
die sî an ir vründe	she hitherto has committed against him
her begangen hât. (129,36).	who loved her.

This poem, probably written in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, leads right into the textual world of courtly culture. It deals with an elaborate configuration of heterosocial relations, constructing an arrangement of men, women and desire commonly referred to as *Minne* ("courtly love"). But this poem

also gives us a glimpse of the relevance, capacities, and facets of inscriptions in medieval German literature. The poem's imagined epitaph consists of certain materials and possesses a certain physical concreteness. It occupies a place and it creates a topological space. It evokes sundry practices and, of course, transmits a message. The criteria elaborated in the introduction to this volume (materials and materiality, topology and mobility, practices) invite a more detailed analysis of Heinrich von Morungen's poem.

The tomb consists of stone, a durable material, not easy to inscribe, but suitable for long-lasting readability and for sustained remembrance. Usually, writing on stone establishes a much more intense relationship between the text and its material than writing on a wax tablet or parchment. That is why lithic artefacts already make a statement by themselves.[26] Though we do not know much about the exact spatial position of the speaker's tombstone, it obviously is positioned on the ground. We should bear in mind that this was quite common in the late antique world and in the European Middle Ages.[27] But this very tombstone and its epitaph nevertheless create a specific space for movement and for communication between the dead and the living. To establish this space, the speaker needs someone to write the epitaph, someone who organises the remembrance according to the speaker's will.

But how are we supposed to imagine the material and spatial arrangement of this imagined inscription? Since it is possible to walk over the stone and the written words, the tombstone lies underfoot, maybe in a cemetery or in the floor of a church. The poem does not give much detail about the surroundings, either because this information is not important or because the recipients were supposed to have possible surroundings in mind. Interestingly, though, the speaker demands that the letters be small. Conceivably, the inscription would not be readable by someone standing above the grave. To read the words, one may have to bow or even kneel and, in doing so, come closer to the dead. The inscription on the tombstone "is designed to affect bodies, to influence their movements and to incite them to read, to speak for the dead lover who had never been able to express his affection while alive".[28] Finally, the epitaph not only tells its reader about the relationship between the speaker and the lady but informs the lady of her blameworthiness. Far from a neutral message, the words have an addressee, they are chosen with the intention to affect somebody.

It would be tempting and certainly interesting to compare this

poem and its imagined epitaph to other poems dealing with script-bearing artefacts. Unfortunately, Heinrich von Morungen's poem seems to present the only transmitted example of a narrated inscription in Middle High German love lyrics.[29] This may be due to a characteristic feature of medieval German love poetry: its orality. As the German term *Minnesang* with its emphasis on singing readily suggests, the "love songs" were meant to be staged in front of a courtly audience, performed by experienced entertainers who put themselves in the position of the lover. As Morungen's poem illustrates, *Minnesang* itself often talks about its own nature as oral communication. In Morungen's poem the speaker addresses the audience directly, referring to the present moment—the "here and now"—in asking for help to connect with his lady. *Minnesang*'s emphasis on orality often displaces any concern with writing. If we want to search for narrated inscriptions in medieval German literature we have to turn our attention away from lyric poems and towards epic poetry.

Tombstones are locostatic artefacts, closely related to their devised place and not easily moved. The largest group of locostatic artefacts (about 30 references in our database) is mainly composed of gravestones and sarcophagi. The comparatively high number of results in this category may reflect the important role played by sepulchral writing in the Middle Ages in general.[30] Apart from religious and clerical contexts (church, cloister, and scriptorium especially), epitaphs probably formed the most frequent and ubiquitous form of writing that was visible to everyone. Because they emerge with the deaths of those they commemorate, epitaphs paradoxically stand for both presence and absence. When death forces beings into representation, their tombs become complex signs that condense and solidify biography, but also address those left behind, linking past to present life.[31]

A romance about Alexander the Great by Lambrecht the Priest provides one of the earliest narrated epitaphs. The artefact here operates as a carrier and transmitter of a distant historical past. In the middle of the twelfth century, when this romance was written, such a connection to the past was of the utmost importance. Authority relied on tradition and tradition required a connection to relevant people and occasions of the past. This lies at the heart of the notion of *translatio imperii*. Accounts of Alexander the Great participate in and illustrate this idea of a "migration of authority". When Alexander's men in Lambrecht's

romance, like archaeologists, excavate a vitreous sarcophagus, they unearth an even more distant past as well. Through the sarcophagus's green translucent glass they can identify a corpse and an inscription revealing the name of the dead man: "His name was Evilmerodach. He had been the king of Babylon" (*Er hîz Evilmerodach*, / *der kuninc in Babilonia was*, 3114f./3566f.).

While the *Alexanderroman* offers the earliest, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* features the most flamboyant epitaph in the German corpus. Probably written during the first two decades of the thirteenth century, Wolfram's text retells and thereby refashions Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, making it suitable for his courtly German audience. Yet, the first part of Wolfram's romance does not appear in Chrétien's *Perceval* and was most likely invented and added by Wolfram himself. This first part recounts the life and death of Parzival's father, Gahmuret. He is an outstanding knight, impulsive, restlessly peripatetic, and to some extent untameable. Gahmuret marries Herzeloyde, Parzival's mother-to-be, only to leave to fight for a Muslim king (the Baruch) and die in combat far away from home. When, shortly before Parzival is born, Gahmuret's squire delivers the news of Gahmuret's death to his wife he recounts the circumstances of the death, and describes the hero's exceptional tomb, and the epitaph engraved in Gahmuret's helmet, called "adamant":[32]

> *In sînen helm, den adamas*, / *ein epitafum ergraben was*, / *versigelt ûfz kriuze obeme grabe*. / *sus sagent die buochstabe*. / *"durch disen helm ein tjost sluoc* / *den werden der ellen truoc*. / *Gahmuret was er genant*, / *gewaldec künec übr driu lant*. / *ieglîchez im der krône jach*: / *dâ giengen rîche fürsten nâch*. / *er was von Anschouwe erborn*, / *und hât vor Baldac verlorn* / *den lîp durch den bâruc*. / *sîn prîs gap sô hôhen ruc*, / *niemen reichet an sîn zil*, / *swâ man noch ritter prüeven wil*. / *er ist von muoter ungeborn*, / *zuo dem sîn ellen habe gesworn*: / *ich mein der schildes ambet hât*. / *helfe und manlîchen rât* / *gap er mit stœte'n friunden sîn*: / *er leit durch wîp vil schärpfen pîn*. / *er truoc den touf und kristen ê*: / *sîn tôt tet Sarrazînen wê* / *sunder liegen, daz ist wâr*. / *sîner zît versunnenlîchiu jâr* / *sîn ellen sô nâch prîse warp*, / *mit ritterlîchem prîse er starp*. / *er hete der valscheit an gesigt*. / *nu wünscht im heiles, der hie ligt."* / *diz was alsô der knappe jach*. (107,29–108,29)

> Upon his helmet, the adamant, an epitaph was engraved, sealed upon the cross, above the grave. The letters read thus: "Through this helmet a joust slew this noble man, bearer of valour. Gahmuret he was named, mighty king over three lands, each of which acknowledged his crown. Powerful princes walked in his train. He was born of Anjou, and before Baldac he lost his life, in the Baruch's cause. His fame shot so high that no-one can match its mark, no matter where knights are tried today. That man is unborn of mother to whom his valour swore surrender—I mean those who have the shield's office. Help and manly counsel he gave with constancy to his friends. For women's sake he suffered most sharp pangs. He bore baptism

and Christian faith. His death grieved Saracens—that is no lie, but the truth. All the reasoning years of his times, his valour so strove for fame that it was with knightly fame that he died. He had won the victory over falsity. Now wish salvation to him who lies here." This was what the squire averred.

So what are we to make of this excessively detailed inscription on an extraordinary artefact? First of all, the inscription is written on a helmet that is fixed on top of a cross erected at the head of Gahmuret's grave, "mirroring the position of the inscription affixed to the cross of the dying Christ", one of the most famous and most commonly known inscriptions of the Christian Middle Ages (cf. John 19:19–20).[33] Second it is questionable that Gahmuret's helmet would have offered enough space for such a long inscription, featuring such a detailed narrative. At second glance, however, it remains unclear if the squire is really, as he states, quoting the inscription ("The letters read thus"). The crucial passage, unsettling the audience's trust in verbal citation, starts with the qualification, "I mean". This interjection interrupts the announced quotation with an explanation, suddenly mingling literacy and orality. In this case, as on many other occasions, narrated inscriptions are not a word-for-word rendering but a narrative device, connecting materiality, writing, reading, and, in case of epitaphs, remembrance and mourning.

To medieval recipients, the presentation of Gahmuret's tomb must have been remarkable and exemplary. Wolfram even mentions this tomb in his *Willehalm*, creating an explicit intertextual connection. And the fame of the tomb is also illustrated by further references to Wolfram's text, for example, in Wirnt von Grafenberg's Arthurian romance *Wigalois* (early thirteenth century). Obviously, narrated epitaphs not only provided connections to distant pasts but also generated intertextual connections between literary texts.

In *Wigalois*, written presumably shortly after *Parzival*, we come across another funeral arrangement, once again embedded in an environment of paganism: after a furious battle, the outstanding knight Wigalois, having been assigned the task of reconquering the kingdom of Kornint, kills the heathen usurper Roaz of Glois, who is said to have made a pact with the devil. Devastated by his demise, Roaz's virtuous wife Japhite immediately follows him into death. Shortly thereafter she is buried in a coffin of red hyacinth filled with burnt balsam and put on two columns of ore. The sepulchral monument is said to be a work commissioned by her husband while he was still alive; but apparently the epitaph must have been created afterwards. Made of golden letters moulded directly onto the precious stone, the

writing reports Japhite's whole biography in 29 verses and asks its readers to pray for her intercession. The inscription is just as detailed as Gahmuret's epitaph. In fact, the narrator explicitly refers to his literary model:

wart Gahmuret ze Baldac	Had Gahmuret at Baldac
von dem bâruc bestatet baz,	been entombed better by the Baruc?
deiswâr, daz lâze ich âne haz,	Truly, I'll leave it at that without hatred,
wand er hêt grôze rîcheit. (8244–8247)	because he enjoyed vast riches.

With this brief intertextual reference to the tremendous wealth of the Baruch, the narrator ironically excuses the less opulent monument in his own narrative. However, quoted directly by the authorial narrator, and not transmitted by one of his characters as in *Parzival*, the inscription in *Wigalois* gains a more reliable and factual quality.

Both examples vary in the way they symbolically exhibit the conflict between Christianity and paganism. Gahmuret, a Christian warrior in the service of a Muslim ruler, is buried far away from his own kingdom, but still in a tomb that features Christian symbols and with an inscription in the language of his compatriots. By contrast, Japhite, the pagan queen, is buried in her own kingdom, but in a tomb marked by Christian beliefs, requesting that visitors or travellers pray for the spiritual salvation of the unbaptised queen. That is why the epitaph is issued bilingually, in French (*franzois*) and a pagan language (*heidenisch*). It is not evident, however, who the author behind the inscription actually is. A converted heathen named Earl Adan is reported to have knowledge of both languages, yet it seems rather unlikely that a passing heathen would intercede with the Christian God for the lady's salvation.

Since gravestones do not necessarily reveal their authors but nevertheless have a certain authority once they are erected, they can function as important signifiers of power. They address those left behind and shape their memory about past events and political order. In this sense, Japhite's bilingual epitaph indicates a significant transformation of the cultural landscape of Kornint. Not only has the era of pagan domination ended, but even remnants of that era have fallen under the control and ideology of the new Christian sovereigns.

Epitaphic writing as a strategy of cross-referencing can also be observed elsewhere in medieval literature, although it might aim at different effects. As the example of Wirnt von Grafenberg

demonstrates, epitaphs can refer to epitaphs in other narratives and highlight the intended appropriation of the art of storytelling by one poet from another. But epitaphs can also function as cross-references within the same narrative and develop a metapoetic function, as in the vast and entangled network of romances about Lancelot.[34] Inscriptions in these narratives commonly serve the purpose of authentication: they are considered reliable traces that confirm the historical truthfulness of antique mythological events. Laura Velte's chapter on tombs in this volume will elaborate this discussion.

Another example of such cross-references occurs in relation to one of the few inscriptions on trees in medieval German literature. In Konrad von Würzburg's *Trojanerkrieg* (c. 1280) Paris is said to have carved an inscription into the bark of a tree in order to comfort his beloved Oenone and allay her concerns about his faithfulness. But, ironically, the durability of the tree inscription ultimately becomes a testimony of his infidelity. Paris's beautifully carved lines will become a symbol of a significant historical turning point. Not only will he change his own mind by falling in love with Helena, but he will seal the fate of the whole Trojan nation.[35] While the chapter on wood inscriptions explores this particular inscription in more depth, we want to draw attention here to the role Paris's hand-carved inscription plays in the vast narrative tradition based on the life and the great campaigns of the heroic commander Alexander the Great. The version of the popular Alexander romance by Ulrich von Etzenbach (written in the second half of the thirteenth century) comprises around 30.000 verses and, unlike earlier versions, contains various narrated inscriptions. They emerge particularly at the point when Alexander in the course of his conquests reaches the territory of Ancient Troy. Before he enters the battleground covered with epitaphs commemorating the deeds of the ancient heroes Alexander passes the forest of Ida and discovers an old inscription that Paris had carved into a poplar tree:

Alexander aber sach *ein papelboum im sô verjach,* *dar an er geschriben las* *ein dinc, daz vor geschehen was,* *ê Trôjâ wart zestoeret.* (4863–4867)	And now Alexander saw a poplar, revealing it self, and he read what was written on it, about an affair that had happened before, before Troy was destroyed.

Mentioning the Trojan War here serves as a literary backdrop for Alexander's own aspirations to power. Within this context, Paris's spontaneously carved inscription features as a topological

landmark indicating Alexander's entry into a legendary realm: reading the inscription reveals a historical event that has unfolded during a time the Macedonian would recognise as the ancient past. As a quite durable artefact the tree inscription can be found, looked at and interpreted as a relic of a distant past. For the medieval audience Alexander's walk through Troy becomes a "recursive panorama" of antiquity, interlacing two important narratives from the same thematic cycle (the Matter of Rome) and thereby revealing different phases of the historical past.[36] In this panorama inscriptions on wood and stone act as reminders and witnesses of a process of historicisation.

4Pitching Tents

In addition to epitaphs, other kinds of locostatic inscriptions can be found on columns or statues as well, either inside or outside of buildings, and sometimes on architectural structures marking transitions and passages, like archways for example. Our database contains 33 inscriptions connected to buildings. This includes six cases of inscriptions on tents, an artefact that complicates Ehlich's distinctions between the locostatic and the locomobile.[37] Tents are mobile but provide a fixed residence for a certain amount of time. They often underline claims to power when erected outside of someone else's domain.[38] But tents can also be introduced in order to create distinguished spaces, such as a "love-tent" (*Minnezelt*), which is usually embedded in a paradisiacal landscape that constitutes an entire realm of love. The only extraordinary form of writing in Hartmann von Aue's influential *Erec* (c. 1180), for example, consists of a conspicuously inconspicuous inscription on such a love-tent (8901–8957).

The tent appears at the beginning of Erec's very last adventure (known as the episode of *Joie de la court*). The hero encounters Mabonagrin, who lives in an isolated community with his beloved. Everyone who enters his garden is considered an intruder and is at risk of being killed immediately. When Erec reaches the location, a magnificent velvet tent catches his eye, featuring an almost cinematographic scene: the fabric depicts women and men, as well as birds that seem to be moving as if they were real; tamed and wild animals complete the picture, all of them portrayed with superscriptions revealing their names. Inside, Erec sees a beautiful lady with a precious dress, sitting on a bed made of silver. The extensive description of the tent makes it a symbol representing the otherness of Mabonagrin's realm:

this tent serves as a place of harmony between men and women and as a place where nature and culture are reconciled. The inscriptions above the icons indicate a systemic order maintained in this territory. However, this order is written on a tent, revealing its temporary nature. And although the tent may separate a private inside from a public outside, the embroidery allows a glimpse into the lady's bedchamber, dissolving the boundaries between public and private.

The tent as a place of distinction appears in many more romances. Another one appears right in the middle of *Lanzelet* by Ulrich von Zatzikhoven (written after 1194). This tent is given to the hero after a series of adventures when he finally defeats his opponent, the knight Iweret, and marries his daughter Iblis. In this specific moment a messenger from his foster mother appears informing Lanzelet about his name and his origins. The tent is offered not only as a nuptial gift, but as proof of the messenger's truthfulness. Resembling the tent in Hartmann's *Erec*, it is likewise made of precious materials and adorned with pictures of birds that seem to be moving, and features a golden gate with inscriptions. Although the narrator claims he is too far away to see properly, he presents the exact wording of the inscriptions:

Dâ stuonden buochstaben an,	There were letters on it
der ich gemerken nienâ kan,	which I could not see properly
wan einer sprach dâ vor:	but one on the front said:
"quid non audet âmor?" –	"quid non audet amor?" –
daz spricht: "was getar diu minne niht bestân?"	that means: "What does love not dare oppose?"
der ander sprach, daz ist mîn wân:	the other one said, I think:
"minne ist ein werender unsin."	"love is a lasting foolishness."
sît ich ze ellende worden bin,	Since I have already gone too far off,
sô stuont dar nâch geschriben:	thus was written thereafter:
"minne hât mâze vertriben;	"Love has expelled appropriateness;
sine mugent samit niht bestân."	they cannot keep company."
(4849–4859)	

While in *Erec* the letters caption the animal pictures, the inscriptions in *Lanzelet* form short, aphoristic phrases that proclaim how travesty (*unsin*) and excessiveness prevail in the realm of love. The combination of Latin and vernacular adds up to a universal knowledge that the narrator, quoting what he cannot actually read, also possesses. Although in both examples love is characterised as an emotional state that is subject to distinctive rules, in *Erec* the love between Mabonagrin and his wife is presented as a rather artificial and vulnerable harmony; whereas in *Lanzelet* it becomes something desirable (literally a

gift) that can be obtained by marriage, emblematically represented by the golden gate.

Script-bearing tents appear also in the rather allegorical worlds of so-called *Minnereden* ("speeches of love"), a genre obsessed with love and the social conventions surrounding it. *Minnereden* are defined as stand-alone texts in rhymed couplets circulating during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, mostly told by a first-person narrator.[39] About 500 texts ranging from 10 to 6,000 verses are known. Although these texts have not received much attention in literary scholarship, they constitute the most extensive genre of German secular poetry in the late Middle Ages.[40] Many *Minnereden* include personified vices and virtues and allegorical scenes, in which script-bearing artefacts—and inscriptions in particular—appear most frequently.

In Peter Suchenwirts *Di schoen Abentewr* (c. 1400) the speaker is walking through a beautiful spring landscape when he discovers a group of tents. One of them clearly stands out for its splendour. It consists of ivory poles, green and golden silk and a sky-like ceiling of velvet that becomes darker towards the Occident and lighter towards the Orient. Pearls are embedded into the fabric creating a visible lettering, said to be *getzedlet*—a rather rare German verb that can refer to a written note as well as to woven textiles:

Dar auf lag vil getzedlet	There lay upon it, textiled,
Der brief von perlein derhaben,	the letter of sublime pearls.
Mit gold erlucht die buochstaben,	Gold illuminated the characters,
Die spruech von der mine	the aphorisms about love
Aus maisterleichem sinne,	with masterly wisdom.
Der ich ain tail zu deutsche laz,	I read some of them in German.
Auch maniger mir unchundig waz	But others were unintelligible to me,
Von vrantzois, von lateine.	in French, and in Latin.
(58–65)	

As in *Lanzelet*, this tent is covered with sayings about love (*spruech von der mine*) in different languages. But unlike the omniscient narrator in *Lanzelet*, the speaker here admits that he cannot read what is written in French and Latin. Neither does he recognise the symbolic value of the tent right away: he expects it to be the property of a commander, but is corrected by a squire, who suddenly comes along and informs him about his mistresses, the personified virtues, Love and Honour. Subsequently, the speaker himself becomes part of the allegorical event. He meets the ladies of the house and witnesses a discussion between Love, Honour and Adventure on the moral decline at court. In contrast to what has been discussed earlier, the tent in *Di schoen Abentewr*

not only offers a contextual explication of the nature of love, but marks the entry into an entire allegorical narrative world in which the script-bearing tent and the knowledge it conveys have become a distinctive literary topos. The moment of entering and leaving this world is constitutive for the whole genre of *Minnerede* and marked here (and elsewhere) by the speaker's lack of knowledge.

5Locomobile Artefacts

Just like tents, locomobile artefacts are related to space but in a distinctly different manner. While tents provide a temporary room, locomobile artefacts can traverse space and change location. According to Konrad Ehlich, they may generally be less durable than locostatic artefacts; but that is precisely why they can overcome the barriers of space and why they can generate multiple situations of reception and communication. These mobile artefacts mediate and convey, as our examples will show, between separated individuals or places, between lovers, for instance, and between separated family members.

Unlike immobile artefacts, locomobile artefacts generally do not function as carriers for collective commemoration, but rather preserve a personal memory. They often combine physically with persons—as weapons, which become "prostheses" of the human body, or as clothing, which can form "a second skin". That is why transportable and inscribed artefacts often provide information about a specific person, such as a name or a moral virtue. Moreover, locomobile artefacts tend to be involved in rather private situations. In *Tristan* by Gottfried von Straßburg (c. 1200) a thin piece of wood with the initials of Tristan and Isolde becomes the agent of a secret communication between the king's nephew and the queen. Floating on the river the message surmounts the social and spatial barriers between the two lovers and reaches its exclusively intended addressee (14421–14444).

Locomobile artefacts, then, are often personal artefacts. The *Song of Roland*, retold in German by Konrad the Priest at around 1170, provides a vivid example. As a hero, Roland is uniquely associated with material culture. Most famous are Roland's sword, called Durendart, and his horn, called Olifant. His elaborate and magnificent armour complements these two artefacts. Before the crucial battle of Ronceval, the narrator carefully describes how Roland puts on his armour: first donning a brightly glowing tunic, then his helmet, sword, and trousers,

and finally, before climbing on his horse, grabbing a spear. While the horn's sole purpose is communication, Roland's helmet is the thing that speaks:

der helm hiez Venerant,	The helmet the hero put on
den der helt ûf bant,	was called "Venerant",
mit golde beworchten,	embraced with gold—
den die haiden harte vorchten.	the heathens feared it.
mit guldînen buochstaben	Golden letters
was an der lîsten ergraben:	were inscribed on the metal stripe:
"elliu werlt wâfen,	"All the weapons of the world
die müezen mich maget lâzen.	have to leave me a maid.
wilt du mich gewinnen,	If you try to capture me,
du füerest scaden hinnen."	you'll carry damage away with you."
(3291–3300)	

Roland's helmet interestingly and exceptionally claims to constitute a body of its own, referring to its own maidenhood, incarnating and gendering itself. Consequently, we may assume two bodies that coexist: the body of Roland and the body of the helmet. The helmet's body is clearly marked as a virginal female body, imposed on a man to protect him. Not only does this assemblage create a bi-gendered warrior, it also links the fighting to sexual intercourse, even to notions of rape. And yet the virginal helmet presents herself as strong, well-equipped and able to defend herself, articulating a self-confident femininity.

A second crucial feature of Roland's helmet is its voice, whose prosopopoeia anthropomorphises the artefact even more strongly and endows it with agency. This is one of the rare cases in German literature when an artefact "speaks" in the first person via its inscription. Yet, the range of this voice remains unclear: to whom and how does the helmet speak? Does the helmet speak to the enemies, the so-called heathens? Can they read the text or have they read it before? And is it the inscription in particular that increases the fear of the pagans? Certainly, the helmet's inscription and voice participate in negotiations of power, codifying emotions and heroic superiority. And yet the inscription is actually inadequate, even wrong. Although Roland is the uncontested hero of *Rolandslied*, he will nevertheless die because he refuses to call for help. The inscription on his helmet articulates a heroic claim that marks the ambivalence of the hero.

Although Roland's helmet is exceptional, narrated inscriptions on weapons are not unusual. They express courtly literature's interest in knightly and martial culture. And they establish a triangular relationship between person, weapon and script.[41] Inscriptions on weapons play an important role in our corpus of locomobile script-bearing artefacts. We have collected 47

inscriptions that belong to clothing and weapons. Twenty passages refer to weapons in particular. We found five inscriptions on helmets, six on shields, one on a lance, one on a lance's banner, one inscription on a sword's scabbard, and one on a sword's grip. This type of inscription seems to be less suitable for conveying a lot of information, but enhances the individuality of its carrier, especially by presenting his name. The inscription's role in "speaking" about a person or revealing his name means it frequently asserts or announces a person's status as a hero. The weapon can be so connected to its bearer as to actually become a part of him, an argument this volume's article on weapons will elaborate.

Roland's helmet is also a vivid example for the agency of material things. Artefacts may have a distinct capacity to act, to influence, and even to move. This anthropomorphic quality of things becomes all the more apparent when there is an exclusive connection between person and thing, such as clothes that lie on the body like a second skin or weapons that lengthen or enlarge human limbs. Often, the writing on these things only names or praises features that characterise the carrier and preclude possible expropriation or usage by someone else. Like gravestones, which contain the same basic information, locomobile artefacts work metonymically.

Locostatic artefacts (such as inscriptions on stone, wood, architecture etc.), in contrast, function as durable placeholders that provide insight into a narrated or legendary past. The narration of such script-bearing artefacts is therefore often self-referential or, if the narrated past is part of another text, achieves an intertexual or metatextual dimension. Things that are neither clearly locostatic nor locomobile constitute a special case. In our examination, this was true of transitory tent rooms that reveal a homogeneous order inscribed in the walls that delineate the room. In such distinguished spaces, inscriptions work by depicting, exhibiting and affirming the spatial principles that apply as soon as the tent is entered.

In courtly communication, written artefacts have a special status: sometimes they remind and comment on (narrated) events, sometimes they indicate affiliations, sometimes they constitute spatially limited orders of knowledge; but for their internal and external readers, they always bridge the manifold boundaries of space and time that are created by narratives. Especially courtly literature of the thirteenth century shows a great interest in the rich and multiform world of things; mediality must therefore always consider materiality.

Wolfram von Eschenbach's fragmentary *Titurel* (c. 1220), a kind of prequel to *Parzival*, proves this point. In *Titurel* a young couple unexpectedly encounters a hound with an exceptional leash. The hound, following the scent of its prey, had run away from its owner. The hound's leash is made of silk of four different colours, studded with rings and pearls that again frame four four-coloured leaves. Letters made of gemstones and fixed on the cord with golden nails appear underneath those leaves. Never, the narrator observes, has a hound ever been equipped with a better leash or a leash with a better hound (147,2–3). By equating the value of hound and leash, the narrator anticipates what follows: eager to learn the conclusion of the story told on the leash, Sigune unknots the leash from the tent pole. The hound runs away and leaves the maiden with a deep wound in her hand where the leash, abruptly yanked away, had cut into her flesh. In *Titurel* the material is simultaneously desirous and threatening. Closely linked with the hound, the artefact and the alphabetic characters have produced an uncontrolled *agency*. Artefact and writing are materially conceptualised in a way that undermines their expected usage. No longer do they fit specific human demands in the context of hunting. As an assemblage, hound and leash produce an extremely variable affordance enabling them to develop their own dynamics and to act unpredictably upon the human world.

Another important example of a thing's agency is the wax tablet in Hartmann von Aue's legendary tale *Gregorius*, written around the year 1200. Saints' legends include references to writing more often than courtly literature because such legends tend to be products of clerical literacy and closer to biblical—that is, written—tradition. Of course, the wax tablet itself is hardly an unusual artefact. Though seldom mentioned in courtly literature, wax tablets are a common and convenient artefact for writing in the Middle Ages.[42] The malleability of wax meant that such tablets could be used for hasty notes or to compose a text that would be carefully written on parchment afterwards. What makes the tablet in *Gregorius* special is its significant role in the story, its "biography", and, in particular, its extraordinary usage.

At the beginning of the narrative, the wax tablet functions as a kind of identity document, or passport, as well as a set of instructions. Gregorius is the offspring of an incestuous relationship between noble siblings. To hide the sin, the child is put into a vessel and left on the sea. Into the vessel, his mother also places some splendid silken fabric, twenty marks of gold, and an ivory tablet, adorned with gems and inscribed by her own

hand (as the text emphasises). The text on the tablet explains that the child is of noble birth, and that his mother is his paternal aunt, and his father his mother's brother. Moreover, the text on the tablet explains that the child was left on the sea to hide the evil deed, but that the child should be baptised and brought up with the help of the gold. If its finder proves to be a Christian, he should increase the treasure and teach him to write so that he is able to read the tablet himself in order not to become presumptuous, and to make amends for his father and commemorate his mother.

For every step in Gregorius's life the wax tablet is decisive. His mother's inscription of her sin and her child's identity joins together the artefact and the child she sends out into the world. Later the vessel is rescued by fishermen and discovered afterwards by the local abbot during a stroll along the beach. Although the fishermen try to hide the child in order to keep the gold, the abbot hears the baby crying and takes the fishermen to task. While one of the fishermen is appointed to raise the child, the abbot, who names the child after himself, determines that Gregorius should become a monk in the local monastery. Because of the tablet, therefore, the child receives a favourable education. However, no matter how hard the local abbot tries, Gregorius would rather become a knight than a monk, especially after the abbot gives him the tablet proving his noble pedigree. As a young knight, adorned with the silk his mother gave him, he sails to his ancestral lands. There he rescues a damsel in distress, whom he marries, only to discover that she is in fact his mother. Interestingly, his mother recognises the silk he wears but discounts her own material evidence, choosing to disregard the idea that she could be encountering her own son. While the sartorial evidence is rejected, the textual evidence is unequivocal: The tablet finally reveals the truth, forcing them to confront their incestuous relationship, and driving Gregorius to perform extreme acts of penitence by becoming a recluse on a small island for seventeen years.[43]

The presence of the tablet highlights the protagonist's state of sin. Gregorius's time as a recluse is marked by the absence of the tablet—which he was forced to leave behind—allowing him to slowly cleanse his compromised spiritual condition. Gregorius's transition from recluse to religious leader reintroduces the tablet as a crucial part of his identity. When Gregorius is found by two Roman citizens commanded by God to appoint him as the new pope, Gregorius first of all searches for his tablet, which was buried by a burnt down stable. Although his companions assume

it was destroyed, Gregorius finds his tablet, “as new as when he, who had made it, gave it away” (*Gregorius*, 3734f.). The tablet is now blank and, miraculously, it looks brand-new. The renewed and clean tablet shows that Gregorius’s life of deprivation as a recluse has enabled him to reach a sin-free state. We may understand this as a divine miracle demonstrating that God has wiped away the sins of his designated pope. Its mission accomplished, the tablet is not mentioned again; and Gregorius can rise to the highest Christian office. The tablet “prescribes” in a very literal sense Gregorius’s path of life and it is marked with traces of the absent mother who exerts influence via the artefact. As a historical sign it identifies but also marks him. And as a portable script-bearing artefact it “carries” authority and becomes a lifelong companion, almost like a fetish.[44]

All these locomobile artefacts can, as we already stated above, overcome barriers of space and multiply situations of reception and communication. They mediate between separate entities, linking and connecting people. And they possess a significant amount of agency, a distinct capacity to act and even to move. This is what distinguishes locomobile artefacts from locostatic ones, which tend to be media connecting to the past and to earlier texts. Inscriptions on tents, in contrast, offer an entrance to allegorical worlds of highly elaborated courtly love, suitable for the later stage of German courtly literature.

6Scholarly Contexts

Gregorius’s tablet has been a popular focus of studies in German scholarship. In fact, in contrast to other medieval literary traditions, medieval narrated inscriptions in general have received some attention from German scholars prior to Heidelberg University’s CRC 933 on “Material Text Cultures”. Interestingly, the earliest stage of this research tradition was initiated also at Heidelberg University at the beginning of the twentieth century under the auspices of Friedrich Panzer, who became a professor of German Studies at the university in 1919. [45] During the 1920s and 1930s he proposed a scholarly endeavour called *Inschriftenkunde* (Inscription Studies). His guides were the extensive collections of Latin and Greek inscription, the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* and *Inscriptiones Graecae* gathered by German scholars in the nineteenth century. Panzer desired a comparable collection from German-speaking areas and proposed to assemble one. This project, fuelled by the

nationalistic atmosphere of early twentieth-century Europe, was meant to highlight a uniquely German medieval heritage in material and textual culture. This political and social environment helped to make Panzer's plan successful. In 1934 the German and Austrian Academies of Science indeed decided to fund the project to collect historical inscriptions from the Middle Ages until the end of the Thirty Years' War. This project exists to this day and continues to publish editions of Latin and German inscriptions.

Interestingly, Panzer had planned on collecting not only historic inscriptions but literary inscriptions as well. What may sound unusual at first actually corresponds to the nineteenth-century tradition of *Germanistik*, which aimed to cover the entirety of Germanic culture. In this context, historic and literary inscriptions go together very well. Panzer's wish, however, was not fulfilled; it was left to others to research and collect narrated inscriptions in medieval literature. The first to do so was Nikolaus Henkel who, in 1992, published a collection of narrated inscriptions, recording 70 instances (of which 26 had already been recorded by Panzer).[46] Henkel is puzzled by the fact that there are quite a lot of narrated Middle High German inscriptions but few "real" German inscriptions during the early and High Middle Ages. Hence his collection serves primarily as a means of comparison between historical and literary inscriptions, but does not provide detailed analysis or the interpretation of the narrated inscriptions he has collected. In 2006, in contrast, Ulrich Ernst published a study on medieval text cultures.[47] His interest lies in the field of Media Studies and he surveys a huge amount of mainly literary texts with regard to various forms of writing. Ernst's collection supplements that of Henkel and provides more information about the textual context and function of narrated inscriptions.

The CRC subproject C05 is working to continue the scholarship done by Panzer, Henkel and Ernst and to enlarge the hitherto existing collection by incorporating examples from less well known genres and texts, as well as by creating and using databases to efficiently search for relevant text passages. In these endeavours we have, for instance, examined particular genres and certain types of artefacts more closely.[48] Nevertheless, while such collecting is important, contemporary scholars should aim to do something more with the information they gather. Using theoretical frameworks informed by Material Culture Studies, participants in the CRC subproject have studied narrated inscriptions in terms of mobility and space, the interfaces

between script-bearing artefacts and their recipients, and the role of particular materials.[49] The work we have done in developing some overall hypotheses about narrated inscriptions also intervenes in the still influential scholarly discussion around orality and literacy, as well as in considerations of the relationships between texts and images in the Middle Ages.[50] Within the framework of these broader theoretical questions, we have analysed the significance of script-bearing artefacts in terms of their individual narrative contexts, on the one hand, and in terms of their broader cultural significance, on the other. We also abandon, of course, the nationalistic premises of the early twentieth century and expand our collection by including other languages and literatures. What once began as a project to identify the distinctly German is now a project that seeks to understand German literature in a broader context and to identify relationships and connections using recent scholarship from diverse fields of research.

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Katja Schulz

Inscriptions in Old Norse Literature

How Everything Started

This article has been translated by Stefan Drechsler.

In medieval Scandinavia, writing is an asset which can only be earned with great sacrifice, but those able to pay the price can then grasp the written letter in a tangible way. We learn this lesson through the mythical genesis of runes in the eddic poem *Hávamál* (Sayings of the High One), in which Odin first brings runes into the world by sacrificing himself to himself:

Veit ec, at ec hecc vindga meiði á	I know that I hung on a windswept tree
nætr allar nío,	nine long nights,
geiri undaðr oc gefinn Óðni,	wounded with a spear dedicated to Odin,
siálfr siálfom mér,	myself to myself,
á þeim meiði, er mangi veit,	on that tree of which no man knows
hvers hann af rótom renn.	from where its roots run.
Við hleifi mic sældo né við hornigi,	With no bread did they refresh me nor a drink
	from a horn,
nýsta ec niðr,	downwards I peered;
nam ec upp rúnar, œpandi nam,	I took up the runes, screaming I took them,
fell ec aptr þaðan.	then I fell back from there.
(stanza 138f.)[51]	

If the text is taken literally, runes are, in fact, the opposite of an inscription, a carving that removes material to leaving the empty space as “script”. Instead, these runes are both substantial and three-dimensional—otherwise they could not be “taken up”. Even if they are not described as such in the stanza above, it is obvious that they are imagined as “staves”, available as raw material for texts and writing. This myth of origin emphatically ascribes specific material qualities to writing in Scandinavia. Its acquisition is connected explicitly to corporality and magical practice: runes are acquired by Odin in the form of an initiation rite; they are regarded as “divine knowledge”, their origin is

imbued with transcendental qualities.

The following chapter will explore these factors further by investigating how literary texts imagine both the material qualities of writing and the practices that contextualise how script is used. It will consider objects turned into artefacts by the addition of script, as well as text-bearing objects that were artefacts before they were embellished with writing. Finally, it will discuss both the human actors who use script and the topological contexts of inscriptions in Old Norse literature.

1Script and the Transmission of Text in the North

This volume is dedicated to script beyond the standards of writing with pen and ink on parchment. But is it possible to define a "standard of writing" for medieval northern Europe? In contrast to the Continent, most parts of Scandinavia possessed not one but two writing systems: runic writing and Latin script.

Latin writing was brought to the North with Christianity, predominantly from Anglo-Saxon areas: first in manuscripts, which were taken to Norway and Iceland initially as booty or items of trade from Viking raids, and then in the course of the Christianisation beginning in the tenth century. It cannot be articulated with certainty when exactly writing built upon Latin letters commenced in the North. It may be surmised that, with the settlement of Iceland around 900, some settlers from England may have taken books with them. Furthermore, an intense cultural exchange between Norway and England which brought both books and the literacy of clerics to the north may have contributed to the arrival of Latin writing in the tenth century. The oldest evidence of Latin script in Scandinavia are fragments of liturgical books (c. 950), while the oldest vernacular fragments (written on calfskin) have been dated to the second half of the twelfth century. In comparison with Europe, northern countries are rather late in introducing the Latin alphabet, but comparatively early in implementing vernacular writing: the oldest preserved vernacular prose text written in a Scandinavian language is the *Íslendingabók* (Book of the Icelanders) by Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði, which was composed around 1125. [52] A further cultural difference between Iceland and the Continent concerns the dissemination of literacy. While the clergy monopolised writing on the Continent, Iceland was ruled by an oligarchy of magnate farmers who were also literate. Written

culture, therefore, more often followed the will of powerful farmers rather than the interests of the Church.[53]

Prior to the rise of Latin literacy, the north made use of a runic alphabet; the oldest sources—dating from c. 200—are from the area of modern Denmark. Materials used for such writing were mainly stone, wood and metal, but bones were also common. In this regard, runic script was created to be inscribed; intended to be written *into* the material rather than *onto* it. With their angular shapes, runes are suitable to be carved on solid material —against the grain of wood, for instance.[54] Early runic inscriptions in particular are often found on artefacts with pragmatic functions, such as helmets, drinking horns or pieces of jewellery. From the middle of the eleventh century onwards, the number of preserved wooden or bone staves whose sole purpose was to carry an inscription increased dramatically. Their comparative scarcity in earlier times, however, may be due to the simple fact that wood or bone decays faster than stone or metal. At the same time, it could indicate a change in the function of writing which might have accompanied the growing prominence of Latin writing culture.[55]

Since the first millennium, then, two systems of writing were available in Scandinavia. For one, writing was a form of carving or engraving into material; for the other, writing was a form of application of one medium to another. This functional differentiation of scripts—"in-scription" and "on-scription", if you will—has several significant implications for the investigation of extraordinary forms of the writing in the Middle Ages more generally. First, a search for narrated inscriptions in Old Norse literature will privilege primarily narratives about runic inscriptions, since runes are the form of script most likely to be engraved or carved. Concomitantly, it will also foreground those materials and mediums related to such inscription practices such as wood or bone. At the same time, this choice also compels the social context: Latin script requires—at least in the North—parchment and ink, which was only available in certain milieus, while runic script only needs a piece of wood and a knife, both available to virtually everybody. In this respect, Scandinavian literature complicates a basic assumption for this volume that inscriptionality is an extraordinary—which is to say exceptional —form of writing. Especially in situations that urgently call for a written message, wooden sticks and a knife were the most readily available resources for writing. This is reflected in a passage of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, a Kings' saga composed by Sturla Þórðarson in 1264f.: a messenger approaches the king to bring

him a “rune stick”, a *rúnakefli*, which carries news of the death of his rival. The king reacts by having those around him begin “preparing a letter”.[56] This example highlights the heterogeneity of writing practices in Scandinavia, where inscription is the more common practice, and draws attention to the social significance, in this case related to class or rank, attributed to these forms of writing.

Functions of Inscriptions

The *First Grammatical Treatise*, composed around the middle of the twelfth century by an unknown writer, offers insight into the primary intended function of Latin writing in Scandinavia:

> I have composed an alphabet for us Icelanders as well, in order that it might be made easier to write and read, as is now customary in this country as well, the laws, the genealogies, the sacred writings, and also that historical lore which Ari Thorgilsson has recorded in his books with such understanding wit.[57] I have used all the Latin letters that seemed to fit our language well and could retain their proper sound, as well as some other letters that seemed needful to me, while those were put aside that did not suit the sounds of our language;[58]

These “different letters” were taken from the vernacular runic alphabet, of course.

Thus, if the Icelandic grammarian is to be trusted (and the earliest testimonies corroborate his case), the introduction of Latin script was initially intended to write down law texts, historiographic, and religious writings, offering the possibility to preserve larger texts. By contrast—due to the greater efforts required to write them—runic inscriptions tend to be rather short. Where reasonably reliable interpretations are available, these inscriptions often consist of names, information on an artefact’s owner or craftsman, magic inscriptions on amulets, commemorations, and inscriptions which express the ability to write in runes. With the advent of the Viking Age in the late eighth century, the number of rune stones increases, most of which carry inscriptions of commemoration. Often formulaic supplements are added, like information about who carved the runes, formulae of protection, magical formulae, invocations to the god Thor, or Christian blessings. By the twelfth century wooden staves become a medium for everyday communication, as evidenced by an archaeological discovery following a fire in the Norwegian city of Bergen. These runesticks—dating from the twelfth up into the fifteenth centuries—contain a large variety of

messages from daily life: accounts, business letters, goods labels, love letters, satirical poems, Christian and magical formula ranging from an ardent wish to the rudest obscenity.[59] The choice of either Latin or runic writing thus was dependent on the length of text, on the available medium, and, relatedly, the social rank of the writer.

Old Norse Literature

Shortly after the introduction of Latin script, writing culture expanded beyond laws, historiographic and religious texts to include other kinds of literature as well. Translations and adaptations of continental courtly literature became popular in the North, along with medieval ballads. Additionally, an independent literature emerged in Iceland and Norway which had no immediate counterpart among other medieval literary genres. It is characterised by three groups of texts: the sagas, eddic, and skaldic poetry. Sagas are stories in prose, often with interspersed stanzas. In most instances, they originated anonymously and were transmitted orally first and in manuscripts from the late twelfth century onwards. Depending on the time, place and protagonist of the story, sagas are classified into a number of subgroups: Kings' sagas, Family sagas, Legendary sagas, Bishops' sagas and Contemporary sagas address Norwegian and Icelandic history, while Saints' and Chivalric sagas are sometimes translations of hagiographic or Old French courtly literature, but sometimes also original literature composed in western Scandinavia. Due to their realistic style of narration, the Family sagas in particular were uncritically seen as historical or anthropological sources up until the twentieth century.

The name Edda applies to two thematically related but stylistically dissimilar Icelandic groups of texts dated to the thirteenth century: the *Poetic Edda* and the *Snorra Edda*. The eddic poems—bequeathed in a main manuscript from c. 1275 named Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to)—are anonymous, alliterative poems dealing with Nordic gods and heroes. Some of these poems are quoted and in parts re-narrated in the so-called *Snorra Edda*, a poetological compendium consisting of three parts, which was composed by Snorri Sturluson (1179–1249) in c. 1220. The first section, *Gylfaginning* (The Deception of Gylfi), recounts the mythological history of the north in prose form as it is a requirement for the correct usage of the poetical language, the so-

called kennings in particular (metaphor-like, poetical circumlocutions). These kennings are gathered and described in the second part, *Skáldskaparmál* (Language of Poetry), while the third part, *Háttatal* (List of Metres), is an annotated didactic poem of all known skaldic metres in 102 stanzas.

Skaldic poetry, the third genuine contribution from western Scandinavia to world literature, is a highly artificial alliterating form of poetry, which was already becoming obscure and subject to misunderstandings during Snorri's lifetime. This is mainly due to the kennings—many of which became unintelligible—as well as due to the poems' highly complex syntax and variety of verse metres. Unlike the other two major genres, skaldic poems were composed by poets—skalds—often identified by name.

For an indeterminate amount of time, all three of these "classical" Old Norse genres were transmitted orally both before and after they were written down—with Latin script. As a consequence, the meta-textual information transmitted in these texts is information about the cultural "other" in regard to script: it is a commentary in Latin script on runic inscriptionality.

2Terminology of Inscriptionality

The vernacular verbs used for writing indicate with varying degree of certainty if the text is meant to be an inscription or meant to be written on a surface (parchment) with Latin letters. Old Norse *rísta* or *rista*, meaning basically "to cut" or "to carve", most likely refers to inscribing something with runes. *Ríta*, on the other hand, which also means "to carve", is the main term used for book writing and in translated literature often corresponds to the Latin *scribere*. Etymologically related to *scribere* is the Old Norse verb *skrífa*, which has a broad range of meanings such as "to describe", "to draw", "to paint", or "to write"; often *skrífa* also refers to "drawn stories". A similar semantic uncertainty is characteristic of other verbs, such as *marka* "to draw, represent, identify, label", or *penta* "to paint, to embellish with drawings." Often only the context clarifies whether these verbs refer to a visual or a scriptural presentation.[60]

In *Alexanders saga*,[61] all of these verbs are used to describe the tombstone of the wife of Darius:

> *Eigi voro þar áscrivoð eða scoren at eins nofn oc verk Grickia konunga helldr var oc þar til teket er heimrenn var scapaðr*. (62)
>
> Not only were there names and deeds of Greek kings depicted or engraved; rather, it began with the creation of the world.

In addition to *skrífa* (here contracted with the preposition *á* “on (to)”), the verb *skera* “to cut”, “to engrave”, and “to carve” emphasises technical skills and materiality. In the description of the stone that follows, it is for the most part impossible to determine whether the verb used most frequently, *marka*, refers to pictorial or written depiction. On the other hand, *skrífa* in this passage stands in most cases for “to write”, as it is supplemented in several cases with the accusative object *nǫfn* “name” and thus refers to language. As a general rule, other words are required to indicate whether a verb refers to inscription. An example is *penta*, which is sometimes complemented by “with golden letters” (*með gullstǫfum*) or similar descriptions.

In the context of runic inscriptions, other verbs underline praxeological aspects. The verb *rjóða* (“to redden”), for example, is used several times in magical contexts where previously carved runes are reddened with blood. Furthermore, *fá* (“to colour”) is sometimes used in relation to runes. Moreover, written runes are read and interpreted (*lesa*, *kunna*, *ráða*) or sometimes blessed (*vígja*).[62]

When considering text-bearing objects, there are, on the one hand, artefacts with a pragmatic function that have been embellished (such as helmets, weapon, or jewellery) and, on the other, objects whose sole purpose is to bear a text. The most common term for the latter is *kefli* (“piece of wood”), sometimes also in the compound *rúnakefli* (“runestick”). Occasionally, a *spjald* (pl. *spjǫld*, “panel”, “plate”) is mentioned, which in translated texts replaces the Latin *tabulum* / *tabula*. An example is *steinspjald* (“stone plate”) for the Tablets of Moses. In addition, wax tables (*vaxspjǫld*) are mentioned at times, predominantly in religious texts from the fourteenth century onwards. For the script itself, the word *rúnar* (fem. pl.) is used, which has a broad range of meanings including “Latin letters”, “runes”, as well as “wisdom”, “learning”, “literature”, and “magical signs”. *Stafr* (“stave”) is used often in relation to letters and corresponds to Latin *littera*. For example, the Latin *Littera est pars minima vocis compositae* is rendered in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* (from the early fourteenth century) as *Stafr er hinn minzti lvtr raddar saman sættrar, sæm rita ma*.[63] Often compounds such as *bók-* or *rúnarstafr*, *stafróf* and so forth are used, most frequently in translation literature or as terms for reading, for written knowledge, or for foreign languages such as *latino stafi* / *girzkum stöfum* / *ebraiskum stöfum* (with Latin/Greek/Hebrew letters).

3Actors

As the introductory paragraph has already demonstrated, script is conceived as divine in the medieval Scandinavian imagination, received and transmitted by Odin. The highest god in Norse mythology is, among many other aspects, also the god of poetry and runes. *Hávamál* also mentions how Odin steals the mead of poetry, a potion which transforms everyone who drinks from it into a poet, from the giants. According to the seventh chapter of *Ynglinga saga*—the first section of *Heimskringla*[64]—Odin uses runes to convey his magical skills: "All these skills he taught along with runes and those songs that are called *galdrar* (magic spells)" (*Allar þessar íþróttir kendi hann með rúnum ok ljóðum þeim, er galdrar heita*, 7f.). The mythological sources confirm that wisdom about runes is privileged and can only be passed on to selected receivers. The eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál* (Sayings of Sigrdrífa) relays—for instance—how the valkyrie Sigrdrífa (equated with Brynhildr in some texts) conveys knowledge about runic magic (stanzas 6–19) and advice for appropriate behaviour (22–37) to Sigurd, probably on behalf of Odin. Part of the instructions on runes in *Sigrdrífumál* is a report on their mythic origin, which is revealed to Sigurd.[65] Sigurd proves himself worthy of the instruction by demonstrating his fearlessness with his ride through the ring of fire encircling the valkyrie.

In another eddic poem—*Rígsþula*—the knowledge of runes is a privilege of kings (stanzas 43, 45) and conveyed by the god Rígr[66] (stanza 36). According to *Rígsþula* 45, a young ruler is legitimated through the use of runes once he has demonstrated that he is able to apply them better than his father:

Hann við Ríg iarl rúnar deildi,	He contended in rune-wisdom with Lord Rig,
brǫgðom beitti oc betr kunni;	he played more tricks, knew more than he did;
þá ǫðlaðiz oc þá eiga gat	then he gained and got the right
Rígr at heita, rúnar kunna.	to be called Rig and to deploy runes.

Knowledge of runes is in this respect equal to the ability to read books. This is mentioned in a skaldic stanza of the Old Norse earl Rǫgnvaldr from the twelfth century. Rǫgnvaldr boasts of himself:

"*Tafl emk ǫrr at efla;*	"I am quick at playing board games;
íþróttir kannk níu;	I have nine skills;
týnik trauðla rúnum;	I forget runes slowly;
tíðs mér bók ok smíðir.	the book is a preoccupation with me and
Skríða kannk á skíðum;	also craftsmanship.

skýtk ok roek, svát nýtir;	I am able to glide on skis;
hvártveggja kannk hyggja:	I shoot and I row so that it makes a difference;
harpslôtt ok bragþôttu". (576f.)	I am able to understand both: harp-playing and poems".

In praise of the Indian prince Liforinus, *Nítíða saga*, an Icelandic romance from c. 1400, enumerates, among many other virtues, that Liforinus is able "to read runes and books" (*runar og bækur at lesa*, 9).

Similar to Odin as the head of mythic society and the king as the head of a kingdom, in the Family sagas magnate farmers and chieftains are depicted as leaders of society. In the whole corpus of Family sagas, no one is more closely associated with the use of runic script than the tenth-century magnate farmer and skald Egill Skalla-Grímsson. The thirteenth-century *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* depicts its eponymous protagonist as an Odinic hero who is linked to the god through his abilities as poet and skills in runes. In *Egils saga*, the use of runes and inscriptions is described in a realistic, mundane setting. The saga elucidates that the correct use of runes is reserved for qualified rune-carvers only. In chapter 72, Egill cures a sick girl who was accidentally cursed by a farmer boy with a love charm carved on a fish bone. Later on, in chapter 76, the narrator explains:

> *þá þóttisk hann rísta henni manrúnar, en hann kunni þat eigi, ok hafði hann þat ristit henni, er hon fekk meinsemi af*. (238)
>
> he thought he would carve love-runes for her, but he had not the skill, and what he had carved caused her illness.

This demonstrates that the combination of runes and the material object they are inscribed on is more powerful than the intention of the carver: it is not important what he wants and what spells he may pronounce while carving; rather, the effect lies in the staves themselves as they are carved. Similar to the previously mentioned mythological poems, the saga assumes that exact knowledge of runes and their use is required—qualities for which Egill is famous, but which cannot be obtained by an infatuated young rascal whose name is not even mentioned in the saga. The carving of runes is a special skill and the uninitiated should not dabble in them. This is pointedly underlined by Egill in a skaldic stanza which follows this episode:

Skalat maðr rúnar rísta,	No man should carve runes
nema ráða vel kunni,	unless he can read them well;
þat verðr mǫrgum manni,	many a man goes astray
es of myrkvan staf villisk;	around those dark letters.

sák á telgðu talkni *tíu launstafi ristna,* *þat hefr lauka lindi* *langs ofrtrega fengit.* (230)	On the whalebone I saw Ten secret letters carved, from them the linden tree [= woman] took her long harm.

When he detects the incompetently carved runes on the fish bone, Egill scrapes them off and burns the scraped material; then he carves new runes into the bone. He orders a change of the bed linen in which the fish bone and the sick girl had lain, and has the old sheets aired out. Slightly later, in chapter 76, the incident is referred to again and explained. Such emphasis on an otherwise incidental event suggests the marked importance of Egill being a particularly skilled rune carver. Several other examples of his carvings will be discussed further below.

The main focus of this chapter so far has been the socially and intellectually privileged users of runes. There are, however, also a number of examples in which rune-magic is practiced by people of lower status, such as the messenger of the gods Skírnir (in the eddic poem *Skírnismál*) or an old foster mother in *Grettis saga*. In fact—in all the genres described above—it is quite common that women are knowledgeable of runes.[67] Sometimes their skills are made explicit, as in the eddic poem *Atlamál* (stanza 11 and 12) and in a prosaic paraphrase of the same episode in *Vǫlsunga saga* (ch. 35 [33]). In this poem, Kostbera—the wife of Hǫgni—not only understands that a runic message has been compromised, she is also able to identify the original message underneath. Kostbera discerns that Atli, Guðrún's husband, has had Guðrún's original message warning her brothers of treachery distorted into an invitation, and so warns her husband:[68]

"Heiman goriz þú,Hǫgni: hygðu at ráðom!	"You intend to leave home, Hogni, listen to advice!
Fár er fullrýninn; far þú í sinn annat!	Few are very learned in runes—go some other time!
Réð ec þær rúnar,er reist þín systir:	I interpreted the runes which your sister cut:
biort hefir þér eigi boðið í sinn þetta.	the radiant lady hasn't summoned you this time.
Eitt ec mest undromc—mácað ec enn hyggia—,	I'm greatly surprised by one thing—I still can't make it out—
hvat þá varð vitri, er scyldi vilt rísta;	why the clever woman should carve so awry;
þvíat svá var <á ví>sat, sem undir væri	for they seemed to indicate an underlying meaning:
bani yccarr beggia, ef iþ brálla qvœmið;	the death of both of you if you hastened there now;

vant er stafs vífi, eða valda aðrir." (11f.)

the lady's missed out a letter or else others have caused this."

Thus, even as there are some social differences in the use of runic inscriptions and Latin script—as exemplified by messenger's runestick and king's letter (likely on parchment) in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*—, in general it would appear that the use of writing in the primary Old Norse sources is not considered as restricted to a particular age, gender, or social rank. Rather it is a matter of initiation.

4Practices

The actions of Egill against the erroneous rune magic of the uninitiated farmer boy have shown that the use of script is related to specific practices. It is indeed remarkable that a number of narrated inscriptions with a magical purpose explicitly mention the process of carving and other practices. An unusually vivid example is found in *Grettis saga*, a Family saga from the fourteenth century, which recounts the Icelandic Viking-Age through the biographical story of Grettir Ásmundarson "the Strong", a skald who presumably lived in the eleventh century. The saga's concluding lines commemorate Grettir as the strongest man of his time and the most skilled at banishing revenants. His enemy can only overcome Grettir with the help of his foster-mother Þúríðr. She

> was very old and not able to do much, so people thought. She had been very skilled in magic and had great knowledge of sorcery when she was young and people were heathen. Now it looked as though she must have forgotten it all. But though Christianity ruled in the land, there were yet many sparks of heathendom remaining.[69]

This episode reflects a general tendency in all the genres discussed above to associate magical runic usage with heathen customs. The scene describes in great detail how Þúríðr performs her task (ch. 79):

> *er hon kom til strandar, haltraði hon fram með sœnum, svá sem henni væri vísat til. Þar lá fyrir henni rótartré svá mikit sem axlbyrðr. Hon leit á tréit ok bað þá snúa fyrir sér; þat var sem sviðit ok gniðat ǫðrum megin. Hon lét telgja á lítinn flatveg, þar gniðat var; síðan tók hon knif sinn ok reist rúnar á rótinni ok rauð í blóði sínu ok kvað yfir galdra. Hon gekk ǫfug andsoelis um tréit ok hafði þar yfir mǫrg rǫmm ummæli. Eptir þat lætr hon hrinda trénu á sjá ok mælti svá fyrir, at þat skyldi reka út til Drangeyjar, ok verði Gretti allt mein at*. (249f.)

> when she got to the shore, she limped along by the water as if she was being guided. There lay before her a log of wood with its root as big as one could carry on one's shoulder. She looked at the log and told them to turn it over for her. It looked as though it had been scorched and rubbed on one side. She had a little flat bit carved where it had been rubbed. Then she took her knife and cut runes on the root and reddened them with her blood and recited spells over them. She walked backwards withershins round the log and spoke over it many powerful formulas. After that she had the log pushed into the sea and made this pronouncement that it was to drift out to Drangey and be a source of every evil to Grettir.

The spell proves to be effective: while Grettir tries to cut the driftwood into firewood, he harms himself and the wound eventually causes his death.

An equally detailed episode occurs in chapter 57 of *Egils saga*, wherein Egill erects a *níðstǫng* (mocking pole) and carves curses into it; this episode will be discussed further below. This kind of magical inscription is not only found in fictional texts, but also in the medical literature. In order to fight jaundice or anaemia, for example, one should carve prayer formulae into wooden sticks and burn them in an invocation of St Mary (AM 461 12mo, a parchment manuscript dated to the sixteenth century).[70] Usually, as evidenced in these examples, spoken components accompany such practices. In other words, one must recite magic spells or invoke gods or saints while carving. In the eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál* the heroine suggests the incision of victory-runes on a sword-hilt, on its blade-guards and on the handle, all while invoking the god Tyr twice (*Sigrdrífumál*, 6).

5Material Dimension and Presence

The introduction to this volume makes clear, the materiality of script and medium is crucial for the study of narrated inscriptions. One can distinguish between script on a medium which is intended primarily for this purpose—such as runic wooden sticks, a wax tablet, or parchment—and script on an object not generally used for writing. According to *Sigrdrífumál*, the whole world can be written upon. When the Valkyrie clarifies the use of runes and the places on which they shall be carved, she includes not only the sword mentioned above, but also a drinking-horn, the back of the hand, a nail, the palms, the prow, the rudder, the oar, the bark, the tree of the wood whose branches bend east, the shield which stands before the sun, the ear and the hoof of horses, the teeth of Odin's horse, the bear's paw and the tongue of Bragi (the god of poetry), the wolf's claw

and the eagle's beak, bloody wings and at the end of a bridge, on a glass and on gold and on men's amulets, in wine and on wort and on a favourite seat. These are only some of the media mentioned in stanzas 6 to 19 of the poem as potential bearers of runes.

Often the object bearing the runic text has a sympathetic relationship to the intended effect of its inscription. Victory runes on a sword help to gain victory, helping-runes on the palms of hands of a midwife help with an easier childbirth, and sea runes on the stem and oar of a ship facilitate a smoother journey on a rough sea. In these instances the presence of script plays an obvious role: script unfolds its (magical) effect at the place where it is affixed. The penultimate stanza of the rune section, *Sigrdrífumál* 18, shows that magic runes are imagined as material. The poem specifies that all runes whose effects and places were listed previously

Allar vóro af scafnar þær er vóro á ristnar,	were shaved off, those which were carved on,
oc hverfðar við inn helga mioð	and stirred into the sacred mead
oc sendar á víða vega;	and sent on wandering ways;
þær ro með ásom, þær ro með álfom,	they are among the Æsir, they are among the elves,
sumar með vísom vǫnom,	some are with the wise Vanir,
sumar hafa mennzcir menn.	some with humankind.

The knowledge of runes and their impact is materially scraped off and mingled into the mead; in this way it becomes substantially concrete, real, and present and can literally be swallowed as spiritual nourishment.[71]

As we have seen in Egill's runic countermagic, the material aspect of script is crucial: the runes are physically removed from the textual medium and the scraped material is burned. That the magical effect of runes can be reversed is also evident in *Skírnismál*, where Freyr's "*postillon d'amour*" Skírnir woos the giantess Gerðr for the god. To compel the unwilling giantess, Skírnir makes use of a curse which obliterates all the joys of life (stanzas 25–36) and finishes with a rune spell:[72]

"Þurs ríst ec þér oc þriá stafi,	" 'þurs' I carve for you and three runes:
ergi oc oeði oc óþola;	Lewdness and frenzy and unbearable desire;
svá ec þat af ríst, sem ec þat á reist,	I can carve that off, as I carved that on,
ef goraz þarfar þess".	if there is need of this."
(stanza 36)	

The curse is "activated" with the carving of three Þurs-runes into

a “taming wand” (*tamsvǫndr*), which is mentioned at the beginning of the curse. Skírnir seems to start carving the runes while he speaks, since he declares in stanza 36 that he will undo the spell “if there is need of this”; in other words if Gerðr yields, which she subsequently does in stanza 37. Here again, the detrimental effect of runes is eliminated when they are abrased. The effect, therefore, is embedded in the connection between wood and script. The signs form a unity with the material, transforming the nature of both.

The same may be said for a drinking horn into which Egill carves runes in chapter 44 to save himself from a poisoned drink. After carving, he smears these runes with his own blood. He describes his action with a stanza:

Rístum rún á horni,
rjóðum spjǫll í dreyra,
þau velk orð til eyrna
óðs dýrs viðar róta;
drekkum veig sem viljum,
vel glýjaðra þýja;
vitum, hvé oss of eiri
ǫl, þats Bárøðr signdi.
(109)

I carve runes on this horn,
redden words with my blood,
I choose words for the trees
of the wild beast’s ear-roots [= horns];
drink as we wish this mead
brought by merry servants,
let us find out how we fare
from the ale that Bard blessed.

The horn then breaks and the drink runs to the ground.

Through the carving of runes and their intensification through blood, the horn undergoes an essential change: it becomes an actor that provides information about the harmful or innocuous nature of the drink which it contains. Here the immediate presence of script determines its impact. Runes carved into horns can also affect the properties of the drink, as exemplified in the eddic *Guðrúnarkviða ǫnnur* (Second Poem of Gudrun): Gudrun is given a drink by her mother which causes her to forget Sigurd, her murdered first husband. “That drink was augmented with fateful power, with the cool sea, with sacrificial blood”, and “In the drinking horn were all kinds of runes, / cut and red-coloured [...] / a long heather-fish, an uncut corn-ear / of the Haddings land, the entrail of beasts”.[73] The material presence of script is also a condition for its efficacy in *Magus saga jarls*, an original Chivalric saga from the fourteenth century. This saga mentions (37f.) that the carving of runes on the shield of Rǫgnvaldr causes each bearer of that shield to take on the appearance of its original owner. Rǫgnvaldr arranges that the shield falls into the hands of one of his enemies, which results in several deaths: everyone who assumes that he has killed an alleged Rǫgnvaldr takes up his shield and thus turns into the next victim.

6Locomobile and Locostatic Inscriptions

Most of the examples of inscriptions discussed above are locomobile, able to take effect at different places depending on where they are carried to (shield, love charm on fish bone, log of wood with curse spell). The concept that script can serve as an efficacious intermediary between two persons also explains the frequent mention of runic wooden sticks in magical contexts. Moreover, such an application of script is not restricted to runic letters. For help with a difficult birth, an Icelandic encyclopaedic manuscript from the sixteenth century (AM 431, 12mo) explains that the Holy Book should be bound to the right thigh of the mother, together with Latin supplications written on a piece of wood or a small parchment.[74]

A rune stick—*rúnarkefli*—is perhaps the most commonly referenced medium for inscription in Old Norse literature; it is the notepad of the Nordic Middle Ages, carrying messages from one place to another (as we have seen in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*), able to record the survival of a hero or preserve a quickly sketched stanza (*Grettis saga*, ch. 66). It is suitable as a tool of memory to withstand the test of time, but also for the transportation of texts of all kind. The findings in Bergen testify to the widespread utilisation of runic wooden sticks in the Middle Ages.

Inscriptions in stone, on the other hand, seem to be intended for durable commemoration connected to a specific place. This is formulated in *Gesta Danorum*, written by the Dane Saxo Grammaticus at the beginning of the thirteenth century, where he admits that the historiography of his fellow countrymen is deficient, since the Latin language—a prerequisite for a literature fit to preserve the history of his own people!—only recently came to his land. However, the lack of Latin script does not mean that his fellow countrymen had no written tradition of commemoration at all, since the great deeds of their heroes were not only praised in poems,

> *Nec ignotum uolo Danorum antiquiores conspicuis fortitudinis operibus editis glorie emulatione suffusos Romani stili imitatione non solum rerum a se magnifice gestarum titulos exquisito contextus genere ueluti poetico quodam opere perstrinxisse, uerum etiam maiorum acta patrii sermonis carminibus uulgata lingue sue literis saxis ac rupibus insculpenda curasse. Quorum uestigiis ceu quibusdam antiquitatis uoluminibus inherens tenoremque ueris translationis passibus emulatus metra metris reddenda curaui, quibus scribendorum series subnixa non tam recenter conflata quam antiquitus edita cognoscatur, quia presens opus non nugacem sermonis luculentiam, sed fidelem uetustatis notitiam pollicetur. Quantum porro ingenii illius homines*

historiarum edituros putemus, si scribendi sitim Latinitatis peritia pauissent, quibus tam etsi Romane uocis notitia abesset, tanta tradende rerum suarum memorie cupido incessit, ut uoluminum loco uastas moles amplecterentur, codicum usum a cautibus mutuantes? (praefatio 1,3)

> I should like it to be known that Danes of an older age, filled with a desire to echo the glory when notable braveries had been performed, alluded in the Roman manner to the splendour of their nobly wrought achievements with choice compositions of a poetical nature; not only that, but they saw that the letters of their own language were engraved on rocks and stones to retell those feats of their ancestors which had been made popular in the songs of their mother tongue. Adhering to the tracks of these verses, as if to some ancient volumes, and following the sense with the true steps of a translator, I have assiduously rendered one poem by another; my chronicle, relying on these aids, should be recognised not as something freshly compiled but as the utterance of antiquity; this book is thereby guaranteed to give a faithful understanding of the past, not a frivolous glitter of style. Moreover, how much historical writing might we suppose men of such genius would have published if they had slaked their thirst for composition knowing Latin? Even when they had no acquaintance with the Roman tongue, they were taken by such an urge to transmit their record to posterity that in absence of books they resorted to massive boulders and granite for their pages.

These inscriptions of heroic poetry in stones and rocks mentioned by Saxo indeed belong to the corpus of narrated inscriptions: the sources and poems to which he refers in this passage do not correspond to any extant inscriptions discovered thus far.

Similar to how Saxo envisions the outstanding deeds of prehistoric times to be literally engraved into the material landscape of Denmark itself, the Norwegian *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðarálfs* depicts the continuity of the Norwegian kingdom engraved into the Norwegian soil.[75] According to the story, when Olaf's mother is in labour but unable to give birth, Hrani—one of the followers of Olaf's father Haraldr—has a dream in which the western Norwegian petty king Óláfr digrbeinn instructs him to open his grave mound, where runes in the earth will guide him to the grave of Óláfr. In it he will find several items, which will speed the queen's delivery if brought to her. The items are intended for her son who shall be named after the petty king Óláfr. The name and the items imbued with the presence of the deceased petty king are thus passed to the newborn child, making him his successor. Likewise, the continuity of the Norwegian kingdom, the path from one Olaf to the next, is engraved with the runes into the land itself.

Stone monuments acting to preserve the memory of eminent figures and tie this commemoration to a specific place also factor into a number of translated sagas (such as the grave of Achilles in

Alexanders saga [15f.]) and hagiographic works.[76] In this context, it is surprising that the historical custom of erecting rune stones for commemoration is hardly reflected in the literature. This may be due to the fact that many of these stones were erected in Sweden, whereas the "canonic" literature explored here originated from the western part of the Nordic region. A few rune stones from the Swedish and Danish areas from the Viking Age attest to a poetic tradition similar to the eddic and skaldic poetry passed down in manuscripts from western Scandinavia.[77] Some Old Norse sources corroborate the custom that stones were erected to commemorate the deceased. The eddic poem *Hávamál* discussed above emphasises the importance of heirs for commemoration, since "seldom do memorial stones / stand by the wayside, / unless one kinsman raises them for another" (*sialdan bautarsteinar* / *standa brauto nær*, / *nema reisi niðr at nið*, stanza 72). But the reference does not specifically mention an inscription. The *Ynglinga saga* ascribes the introduction of the custom to erect stone monuments to Odin, but here, too, no mention of runes or inscriptions is made.[78]

Locostatic inscriptions do not only serve a commemoration bound to a particular place, but may also, at times, have a magical effect. This is the case with a further example from *Egils saga* (ch. 57), where Egill raises a *níðstǫng* on an isle off the coast of Norway facing towards a royal manor near the city of Bjørgvin (Bergen). He raises this mocking pole against the Norwegian King Eiríkr:

> *er þeir váru seglbúnir, gekk Egill upp í eyna. Hann tók í hǫnd sér heslistǫng ok gekk á bergsnǫs nǫkkura, þá er vissi til lands inn; þá tók hann hrosshǫfuð ok setti upp á stǫngina. Síðan veitti hann formála ok mælti svá: "Hér set ek upp níðstǫng, ok sný ek þessu níði á hǫnd Eiríki konungi ok Gunnhildi dróttningu,"—hann sneri hrosshǫfðinu inn á land,—"sný ek þessu níði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byggva, svá at allar fari þær villar vega, engi hendi né hitti sitt inni, fyrr en þær reka Eirík konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi." Síðan skýtr hann stǫnginni niðr í bjargrifu ok lét þar standa; hann sneri ok hǫfðinu inn á land, en hann reist rúnar á stǫnginni, ok segja þær formála þenna allan.* (171)
>
> When their sails were hoisted, Egill went back on to the island. He took a hazel pole in his hand and went to the edge of a rock facing inland. Then he took a horse's head and put it on the end of the pole. Afterwards he made an invocation, saying, "here I set up this scorn-pole and turn its scorn upon King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild"—then turned the horse's head to face land —"and I turn its scorn upon the nature's spirits that inhabit this land, sending them all astray so that none of them will find its resting-place by chance or design until they have driven King Eirik and Gunnhild from this land." Then he thrust the pole into a cleft in the rock and left it to stand there. He turned the head towards the land and carved the whole

invocation in runes on the pole.

With its face in the direction of the Norwegian mainland, the pole, it is suggested, banishes the prevailing land spirits. That is to say that the pole is able to cause this ban due to its position and orientation. It is worth remarking that this episode is one of the very few examples of narrated inscriptions where the very wording of a magical inscription is quoted in its entirety. The vast majority of the narrated inscriptions only mention the act of carving without relaying the actual content.

7Areas of Application

To sum up the various applications of inscriptions in Old Norse texts: One can distinguish—though not always clearly—between the primary function of writing (to represent language), and secondary functions (where the main function is unrelated to the representation of a system of linguistic signs). The latter is the case when script is deployed as a form of magic, as in love charms, harmful spells or the magical expulsion of the royal couple in *Egils saga*.[79] It also seems to be the background in *Sigrdrífumál*, where almost every object can be augmented with runes and, through them, made more effective. These inscriptions intensify the skills and properties inherent in the inscribed object. The carved runes impart a magical or mythic power which becomes effective through their presence in the material. This effect remains with the material even after the runic signs are destroyed when the surface is scraped off and stirred into the mead, as described in *Sigrdrífumál* 18. The magical use of script in particular is associated with heathen customs. This may be one of the reasons why such carvings are relayed in such dazzling detail, as we see with the log which causes Grettir's death. In some magical rituals, however, the material inscription must be supplemented with an oral recitation for the charm to be effective, as is the case with Egill's *níðstǫng*.

Where writing is applied in its primary function, the representation of language, it frequently serves to bridge a distance in time or space and thus also separates sender and receiver in terms of narrative structure.[80] Of course, such a message may be unreliable and may no longer represent the intention of the sender, as we have seen with Gudrun's message to her brothers in *Atlamál*: the warning is manipulated into an invitation, and thus brings about the brothers' doom. Since this counterfeit is in fact visible to an expert eye—the eddic poem

highlights the vital necessity of a thorough exegesis—it provides an example of textual criticism ante verbum. Unlike mobile messages, inscriptions commemorating a person or an event are generally bound to one place. Memory belongs to a land, such as the Danish heroic stories which Saxo claims to have taken from rock inscriptions in his *Gesta Danorum*, or is tied to a funerary monument which commemorates the dead.

Narrated inscriptions where stanzas carved in pieces of wood or tablets claim to serve as a written record of poetry merit additional consideration. One prominent example appears, once again, in *Egils saga*. The saga describes how Egill overcomes his great sorrow for the loss of his two sons by composing the skaldic poem *Sonatorrek* (Irreparable Loss of Sons), one of the finest and most well-known skaldic poems of the Nordic Middle Ages, consisting of 24 to 25 stanzas. His daughter Þorgerðr who encourages him to compose the poem simultaneously carves the whole skaldic poem onto a piece of wood.[81] This appears implausible—due to the time such a carving would take, the many pieces of wood she would need for the carving, and finally because no such long poem is known to have been transmitted on such a medium.[82] Nevertheless, several sagas describe lengthy inscriptions carved into wooden logs. *Qrvar-Odds saga* from the thirteenth century describes how the saga hero Qrvar-Oddr (Arrow-Oddr) composes an *Ævikviða*, a poem that reviews his life. He urges his companions who sit next to him "to carve in accordance with the poem that I intend to compose about my actions and my life [...] and they carve into a piece of wood";[83] depending on the manuscript, this poem comprises up to 71 four-lined stanzas (ibid., 198–208). We may assume that the poetical inscription mentioned either corresponds to the quoted text or was expected to be commonly known.[84]

A narrated inscription may be considered a more trustworthy witness to the authenticity of a poem or stanza than mere oral tradition or it may highlight the content as worthy to be passed on word for word. The poems attributed to Egill and Qrvar-Oddr are carved onto objects which have no other purpose than to preserve the poems. Quite the opposite applies to a stanza in chapter 24 of *Flóamanna saga*, that is inscribed onto a paddle and which may be reminiscent of a work song:[85]

Vaskat ek dási,	I was no laggard
er ek þessa dró	When I pulled this oar
opt ósjaldan	Again and again,
ár á borði;	At the ship's side;
sjá gerði mér	It gave me
sára lófa,	sore palms

meðan heimdragi	while the stay-at-home
hnauðat rauða.	beat at bog-ore.

The condition and location of the script-bearing object effectively underline the content of the stanza: the paddle is found in fragmented form by the shipwrecked protagonists in the Greenlandic ice, highlighting the dangerous life of Icelandic seafarers. This last example reminds us of how the materiality of an inscription imbues an inscribed artefact with additional semantic content which goes beyond what the abstract sign system of script expresses in language. The inscribed paddle performs its own story of the shipwreck and the onerous existence of seafarers, recalling Odin's ordeal in *Hávamál* and suggesting that for both mortal and god the boon of material writing is indelibly bound up with the struggle to survive and thrive in the North.

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Christine Neufeld and Ricarda Wagner

Inscriptions in British Literature: From Runes to the Rise of Public Poetry

From the retreat of the Roman Empire until the rise of the Tudors, medieval Britain's landscape was a veritable palimpsest on which successive conquerors sought to leave their marks. The topic of inscriptionality and the inscribed material object requires the scholar of medieval British literature to make both cultural and temporal distinctions. Anglo-Saxon poetry reminds us that the Britain encountered by the tribes migrating from northwest Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark in the fifth to the seventh centuries was littered with traces of earlier cultures: both the mythical, the race of "giants" whose monuments they viewed in Stonehenge, and the historical, the Latinised Celts pushed from their Roman centres to the fringes of the island. A few centuries later, the Anglo-Saxon society that had begun to coalesce into an "English" culture through the literary labours of the Church and monarchs such as King Alfred the Great (849–899) was disrupted by another military incursion from the Continent. The linguistic and literary shifts precipitated by the Norman invasion in 1066 would take another two centuries of a distinct Anglo-Norman ruling class to resolve into the Middle English tradition familiar to readers of Chaucer or Malory. Since the different periods of literary history in medieval England discourage a strictly chronological account, this chapter is divided into three thematic sections: writing artefacts and cultural difference; public and private forms of texts; and inscriptionality in the rise of an "English" literary tradition. Consequently, even as Anglo-Saxon texts will, of necessity, feature more prominently in our discussion of cultural difference, and late Middle English ones in our account of the literary tradition that emerges in the period, each section will develop a thematic argument with reference to texts from multiple periods.[86]

1Writing Artefacts and Cultural Difference

The unifying factor in the three linguistically defined periods of medieval British literary history—Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman and Middle English—is Latin Christianity. Its introduction to the Anglo-Saxons through missionary endeavours from Rome in the sixth century brought with it the Roman alphabet and a literary corpus to inspire the Anglo-Saxon literary imagination. In the emerging monasteries where the art of writing flourished, Anglo-Saxon monks, however, also continued to remember and transmit their pagan Germanic inheritance in the form of orally circulated stories and a distinct script consisting of carved runes. These two cultural systems, Latin Christianity and Germanic paganism, both left their mark on Old English and Anglo-Latin texts as well as on Anglo-Saxon scribal culture, which was practiced and imagined in two ways: writing in ink and carving with knives, script on vellum and on stone/wood/metal, the lettered book and the rune-inscribed object.

In the literature of early medieval Britain, material inscriptions are intricately tied to Christian ritual time and space. Two of the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book, short enigmatic poems that challenge the reader to guess the described object, illustrate how text-bearing artefacts used as ritual props invite the participation of all those who read their words. Riddle 48 and 59 may both be interpreted to imagine a chalice that is passed around "to men" (*hæþelum*, 48:1, 59:17) "in the hall" (*in healle*, 59:17), the gathering place for an Anglo-Saxon community. However, the chalices are not only imagined as object-media that recall and reiterate Christ's Last Supper for the participants in communion. They are text-bearing agents whose voices actively engage the believers.

The inscriptions on the chalices are conceptualised as speech, rather than writing.[87] In Riddle 48, the chalice "spoke with powerful words: 'Heal me, helping saviour'" (*strongum wordum* […] *cwæð: "Gehæle mec, helpend gæsta"*, 48:3f.). The inscription, the chalice's speech, is quoted directly here, in contrast to Riddle 59, in which the inscribed object only "spoke a word" (*word* […] *æfter cwæð*, 59:5): it "named the Redeemer" (*hælend nemde*, 59:6). While the chalices are presented as eloquent, they are, oxymoronically, also "without tongue" (*butan tungan*, 48:2), "silent" (*swigende*, 48:4) and "dumb" (*dumba*, 8).[88] Their speech, however, may be perceived by men's "eyesight" (*eagna gesihð*, 59:9). With this interweaving of the auditory and visual senses, the two riddles pointedly express the paradox of text-bearing and voice-endowed, yet inanimate artefacts.

Given the silence of the lifeless object, it is its materiality that

lends it a voice. While the believers hear and read "the speech of the gold" (*readan goldes*, 48:6), they may interpret the first person of *Gehœle mec* as either their own voice, the chalice's, or both. Riddle 59 even specifies that it is not the ritual drinking vessel that is speaking, but "the wounds of the chalice" (*wunda* [...] *hringes*, 59:16f.). This phrase both recalls the incisions the engraver would have had to make in the metal to form the letters of the inscription and evokes Christ's stigmata. The inanimate gold of the chalice and the organic flesh of Jesus's incarnation overlap, two materials both naturally silent, but meaningful when engraved.

Such a blending of multiple images is characteristic of the enigmatic speech in the Exeter Book Riddles. These two examples demonstrate how inscriptions oscillate between orality and writing. The text-bearing chalices exemplify a hallmark of Christian thinking, namely the permanence of a holy tradition and the immediacy of a ritual shared by a group of believers. In addition, the inscribed objects invite continuous interaction: the chalices are to be handled, "revolved and turned" (*wylted ond wended*, 59:18), to be listened to, to be read, to be understood in their spiritual meaning, and finally to be discovered by the reader of the riddles, whose presence merges with the texts' notion of transcendence.

In addition to Latin scripturality as an acquired tradition to be cultivated, medieval British literature also negotiated the remnants and meanings of a pagan inheritance. Pre-Christian Germanic cultures not only told and retold their own set of mytho-historical narratives, but bequeathed to Anglo-Saxon England a specific writing system, carved runes whose angular shape made them particularly suitable for inscriptions in stone and wood. While the earliest runic writings predate the conversion of Germanic regions, they continued to be used alongside the Roman alphabet for both public commemoration and everyday purposes such as name-tagging and calendars.[89]

A number of archaeological findings from Anglo-Saxon England demonstrate that inscriptions in different scripts even existed side by side on the same object. The Franks Casket, for instance, a whale's bone box of Northumbrian origin dating from the eighth century, presents such an intriguing mélange. On each panel, a central image depicting human and animal figures from Germanic mythology or Romano-Christian history is framed by an inscription that runs along the edges of the casket. While most of the text is written in Old English with runic letters, the rear panel contains a short passage in Latin written with Roman

letters and another Latin word transcribed in runes.[90] In a similar fashion, the monumental Ruthwell Cross (Northumbria, eighth century) preserves script in both Latin, spelled with the Roman alphabet, and Old English, engraved in runes.

In addition to such elaborate bilingual monuments, smaller Northumbrian name stones show that biscripturality might have been more ubiquitous than the isolated findings of the Franks Casket and the Ruthwell Cross suggest. Discovered at monastic sites such as Lindisfarne and Hartlepool, the name stones are rectangular slabs sized between 19 and 42 cm in height inscribed with a personal name arranged around a cross. Some stones even bear the names of two persons, one in Roman capitals and one in runic script. While scholars agree that the function of the name stones was likely commemorative, their script-mixing is a matter of debate. They might have been addressed to a readership familiar with both alphabets or might commemorate persons who took on a different name once they entered religious life.[91]

Not only archaeological objects of whale's bone and stone, but also literary texts from Anglo-Saxon Britain at times present their readers with a puzzling juxtaposition of different scripts. The Old English elegy *The Husband's Message*, for example, consists of 54 alliterative verses with five runic symbols embedded in the last lines of the text. The elegy imagines how a displaced man sends an inscribed piece of wood as a letter to his lover at home, asking her to join him in his new homeland where he has come to prosper. While the exiled nobleman (*se þeoden*, 29) is clearly identified as the sender of the message and the "prince's daughter" (*þeodnes dohter*, 48) as his addressee, it is less obvious who is the first-person narrator opening the text with "now I will tell you in private" (*Nu ic onsundran þe secgan wille*, 1). This speaker, who later refers to "the one who engraved this piece of wood" (*se þisne beam agrof*, 13), might be a messenger entrusted to relay the wooden letter, who then gives an additional oral report on the exiled man abroad.[92] Other readings, in contrast, maintain that it is the piece of wood itself that pronounces its own inscription. This thingly speaker has been identified with a personified rune-stick, a writing tablet or even the engraved mast of a ship.[93] For the purpose of this study, we merely assume the text refers to an inscribed piece of wood of indeterminate shape that is mobile enough to reach its intended reader.

Throughout this text, the prosopopoeic "I" is urgently concerned with establishing trust. It mentions the man's "gloriously steadfast faithfulness" (*tirfæste treowe*, 12) and the "spoken vows" (*wordbeotunga*, 15) the pair had exchanged in

former times in an attempt to convince the woman of her exiled lover's improved state and to hasten her to set sail at once. As doing so would be risky, the inscription makes a final assurance at the very end of the text. After several references to oral information and oral instructions (*secgan*, 1; *gehatan*, 11; *Heht*, 20; *sægde*, 31; *wære*, 52), the speaker concludes his message with visual symbols that need to be read to be understood:

Ofer eald gebeot incer twega	According to an old vow between the two of you,
ge[h]yre ic ætsomne ᛋ · ᚱ geador,	I hear S . R, EA . W and M
ᛏ · ᚹ ond ᛗ aþe benemnan	declare together by oath
þæt he þa wære ond þa winetreowe	that he would keep the vow and the pledge of friendship
be him lifgendum læstan wolde	as long as he lives,
þe git on ærdagum oft gespræconn.	which you two had often pronounced in the past.
(49–54)	

Much scholarly ink has been spilt over how to interpret the runic characters. Bragg argues that Anglo-Saxon readers would have read them as "bookish alphabet play" (39) that draws on the contemporary monastic use of runes as cryptographic symbols to be deciphered by the knowing. She maintains that taken together, the runes "spell a word" (38), but does not say which word would be plausible.[94] Other readings have taken the name-values of the runes and transcribed them as "heaven" (*sigelrad*), "earth" (*earwyn*), and "man" (*mon*), the elements invoked to ensure that a vow would be effective.[95] Niles, using the same decoding method, advocates a different reading,[96] but also offers an interpretation of the effect that the runic characters might have had on their readers. *The Husband's Message* employs a strategy he calls "runification",[97] which serves to give the text an air of mystery and renders it "more antique".[98] However, he also claims the special runic characters serve as a comforting sign to the woman that her lover's message is true, which raises the question how something that mystifies and defamiliarises can also be reassuring.

As a text written on a vellum page, *The Husband's Message* in its last lines does not simply present glimpses of a divergent script. The inserted runes draw attention to more than the practice of writing as a means for private communication.[99] They also evoke a different writing material, more recalcitrant and less processed than parchment, into which linguistic signs had to be cut with force. This material is highlighted at the very beginning of the text. The speaker opens its monologue by informing us that

"I grew from a shoot" (*ic tudre aweox*, 2) and refers to "a kind of tree" (*treocyn*, 2) that the piece of wood might have originated from.[100] We are presented not only with a speaking, text-bearing object, but with an organic substance that is self-aware to the point of autobiographical narration. As Zweck has argued, the piece of wood is a "hypermedium" that compells the reader to face its materiality along with its message.[101]

As medieval communicative practice closely connects the qualities of the representative intermediary with the absent sender, a mobile inscription that foregrounds its own materiality adds credibility to a distant exile. The vocabulary of trust and the runic script are not the only reassuring elements. These special, epigraphic characters are inscribed onto an object made of wood, a rare writing material in later Anglo-Saxon England, which preferred parchment. The text presents a message that is encoded, arcane, personal, private, yet emphatically material, which turns its extraordinary xyloglyphs into a powerful stand-in for the absent, signifying lover.

Nowhere in *The Husband's Message* do we learn how the lady reacted to reading the letter and its cryptic runes. It is impossible to guess whether she would have interpreted them as the unique signature of her beloved or been left puzzling at their archaic appearance. In the epic *Beowulf*, in contrast, a sword hilt engraved with strange written symbols presented to King Hrothgar has provoked a number of scholarly debates regarding the King's literacy, his capacity to interpret the writing, and even the precise language and script of the inscription. Recovered by the poem's eponymous hero from the underwater cave of a monster-mother he had just slain, the inscribed sword hilt is both an obvious trophy and an unintelligible relic. It provides an interesting starting point to explore epigraphic readability and the reader-response theory of inscriptions scrutinised by both fictional characters and scholars.

The hilt enters the story as follows: Beowulf has followed the monster Grendel and his mother to their submerged lair. When he engages the mother in combat, his sword fails to do damage. Fortunately, he spots an "old sword of giants" (*ealdsweord eotenisc*, 1558) mounted on the wall of the cave, grabs it, kills the monster-mother and beheads her son. Drenched in their poisonous blood, the blade of the sword melts way (*gemealt*, 1608), leaving Beowulf with only the hilt, which he takes back to the surface along with Grendel's head. During the ensuing victory celebration, the triumphant hero presents the *gylden hilt* (1677) to King Hrothgar, whose hall the monsters had been haunting. Even

though the narrator announces that “Hrothgar spoke” (*Hrōðgār maðelode*, 1687), the text does not go on to quote the King. Instead, the narrator allows the audience to view the hilt through Hrothgar’s eyes. Hrothgar

hylt scēawode	examined the hilt
ealde lāfe, on ðǣm wæs ōr writen	of this relic of old times. On it was engraved
fyrngewinnes syðþan flōd ofslōh	the origin of ancient strife, when the flood destroyed
gifen gēotende gīganta cyn. (1687–1690)	with rushing seas the race of giants.

Furthermore, the hilt also records for whom the sword had first been made “with runic letters correctly incised” (*þurh rūnstafas rihte gemearcod*, 1695). Only after this ekphrasis by the narrator does Hrothgar give his anticipated speech, an exposition on the many challenges of good kingship whose relationship to the narrative born by the “old heirloom” (*ealde lāfe*, 1688) has puzzled generations of readers.

Is “Hrothgar’s Sermon”, as the speech is commonly called, a sign that he has grasped the hilt’s message or an indication that the script is illegible to him? Some suggest he does not succeed in deciphering the text: the King merely looks (*scēawode*, 1687) at the hilt, but there is no mention of him reading the inscription; his subsequent speech proves that he did not understand a word written on the hilt, otherwise he would have made some reference to it in his “Sermon”.[102] However, the text’s equivocality allows very divergent readings. Lerer, for example, argues that Hrothgar’s lecture on the transience of power in fact shows that he read and processed the meaning behind the tale of the end of the giants, although he does not explicitly refer to the inscription.[103] Even as we know Hrothgar looks at the hilt, audiences ultimately remain unsure of what he perceives.

The exact design of the hilt also continues to pose a riddle to scholars. It is marked with meaningful symbols from which the narrator infers two things: the hilt tells the story of how a race of giants perished in a deluge sent by a vengeful God and it identifies the original owner of the sword. The latter information is engraved *þurh rūnstafas*, which may mean either “with letters” in general or “with runes” in particular.[104] While this phrase refers to linguistic symbols of some sort, the story of the giants is simply *writen* on the hilt. The ambiguity of this passage has prompted a number of attempts to guess at the language and script with which the hilt was inscribed. Frantzen, for example,

works with a narrow understanding of *rūnstafas* and assumes the inscription is made with (secret) runes.[105] Schrader, in contrast, contends that the hilt was inscribed with a Hebrew text since this is the language that was presumed to be spoken in the period between the Noachian flood and the Babylonian confusion.[106] *Beowulf*, then, demonstrates that one instance of writing in an otherwise preliterate fictional world increases ambiguity more than it secures meaning.

Hrothgar's (il)literacy and hermeneutic (in)abilities along with the inscription's linguistic indeterminacy also influence how the poem's audience interprets the role of the text-bearing artefact. If the King's speech is indeed prompted by the words on the hilt, the inscribed object can function as a "historic provocation",[107] a reified reminder of *vanitas* and a caveat that even triumphs like Beowulf's are never permanent. If, in contrast, the poem's characters can only appreciate the surface of the incised hilt without comprehending the meaning of the inscription, the passage raises "a concern over how stories of the present are conveyed to future audiences and, specifically, how histories may be transformed by the kinds of artefacts that carry them".[108] It makes the reader of *Beowulf* wonder whether the poem itself might not be very similar to the fictional inscription: both chronicle the eventual downfall of once mighty protagonists, challenging audiences to imagine the possible outcomes of their own acts of reception.[109] In a sense, the inscribed artefact has become pure text. While the gold-inlayed hilt endured, the iron blade melted, rendering the object useless as a weapon. While no more heroic deeds can be done with the mere sword-fragment, its indeterminate script still has agency in that it affects both Hrothgar and the poem's audiences, who understand themselves to be as removed from the poem's historical setting as Hrothgar is from the giants.

As scholarly attempts to decipher the sword hilt in *Beowulf* illustrate, the English literary imagination contained a sense of alternate alphabets whose alienness, while mystifying, did not preclude the message's pertinence to future generations, even to other peoples.[110] Consequently, the unresolvable riddle posed by an illegible inscription could cast the inscribed object as *unheimlich*. The preface to the late fourteenth-century alliterative poem, *St Erkenwald*, for instance, imagines Anglo-Saxon Britain as a pagan landscape forcefully overwritten by Augustine of Kent, who has pagan idols recast as saints (cf. 17–20). Augustine's renaming of sacred architecture anticipates the central conflict of the poem, the return of the repressed, in the discomfiting

discovery of a mysterious tomb and its well-preserved occupant in the heart of St Paul's Cathedral in London. The poem dwells at length on the first unsettling feature of this marvel: no one can read the beautifully engraved golden letters on the elegant tomb.

& Þe bordure enbelicit wyt bryȝt golde	And the border is embellished with bright gold
lettres;	letters;
But roynyshe were þe resones þat þer on	But mysterious were the words that stood there
row stoden.	in a row.
Fulle verray were þe vigures, þer auisyde	The letters were very clear, that many [observers]
hom mony,	noted,
Bot alle muset hit to mouthe & quat hit	But all pondered how to pronounce [the words]
mene shulde;	and what it [the text] meant;
Mony clerke in þat clos, with crownes ful	Many clerks with shaved crowns in that place
brode,	
Þer besiet hom a-boute noȝt, to brynge	Busied themselves without success to translate
hom in wordes.	the words.

(51–56)

The possible etymological link between the Old Norse *rūn* and the Middle English *roynyshe*, denoting "mysterious, strange", illustrates the metamorphosis of the ubiquitous into the esoteric that informs Niles's concept of "runification". Setting aside the etymological debate, we can conclude that Middle English literature inherited the Anglo-Saxon *literati*'s perception of runes as what E. J. Christie terms, "a semiotic principle of secrecy".[111]

If the insertion of runes in *The Husband's Message* signalled the use of divergent writing practices as a means of private communication, we see that the course of history can also transform an inscribed object's commemorative public address into arcane knowledge accessible only to the educated elite. In the case of *St Erkenwald*, the object demands a miraculous intervention to give up its meaning, as even seven days of searching St Paul's library yield no answers (155–158). Strikingly, St Erkenwald's intercession overlooks the puzzling inscription altogether; instead he revives and interviews the righteous pagan judge directly. The detailed ekphrastic attention the poem dedicates to sketching out the visual elegance of the tomb and its inhabitant gives way in the second half of the poem to dialogue between the saint and the virtuous pagan, leaving the initial marvel, the untranslatable epitaph, as an unresolved remainder.

To recognise the inscribed object as "in excess" draws

attention to the degree to which the poem itself portrays materiality as both seductive and misleading. The shining gold letters inscribed on the tomb's border anticipate the tomb's interior *al with golde payntyde* (75), as well as the *glisnande* ("glistening") golden hem of the judge's gown (78), and his *gurdille* ("girdle") *of golde* (79). The judge's magnificent clothes and coffin contribute to the people's initial misreading of the mysterious corpse as that of a king. Later the undead judge explicitly explains that he had no control over the fact that his body was *buriet* ("buried") *in golde* (225–226, 248). Materially associated with this sartorial misdirection, the gold inscription itself becomes untrustworthy, representing the written letter as potentially deceptive, much like the motif of the false grave found in classical and Continental romances of the British corpus, such as *Apollonius of Tyre* (eleventh century) and *Floris and Blancheflour* (c. 1250).

St Erkenwald's mysterious inscription stands in stark contrast to a contemporaneous popular legend of the virtuous pre-Christian pagan then circulating in the travel narrative, *The Book of John Mandeville* (c. 1357–1366). The author recounts his visit to the Church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople and a tale of its sepulchral marvel (227–234). When the emperor buries his father he discovers another grave covered with a great plate of gold: A*nd theruppon was i-writen in Ebru* ("Hebrew"), *Gru* ("Greek"), *and Latyn thus: Jhesu Cristus nascetur de Virgine Maria et ego credo in eum. That is to say: "Jhesu Crist shal be bore of the Virgyn Mari and I belyve on Hym"*. Mandeville explains that the source of this confession of faith two thousand years before Christ comes from none other than Hermogenes the Wise. Here the lapidary characteristics and incorruptibility of the gold plate, functioning as a written record of an otherwise ephemeral oral confession of faith, allow the righteous pagan to correct future misinterpretations, both divine and mundane, of his proper place in Christian teleology.

The attribution of this legend to Hermes the Wise, also known as Hermes Trismegistus (the purported author of the Hermetic corpus in the medieval imagination), gestures to the association of the inscribed object not with a holy time or ritual space, but with Eastern esoteric learning. Such an association may even haunt *St Erkenwald* in the poem's reference to the people's perplexity at the *quontyse strange* (74) just before the tomb is opened to reveal its golden interior and elaborately costumed inhabitant. The modern English translation of this phrase as "strange marvel" misses the complexity of the term *queintise*,

which in Middle English can also denote both “elaborate clothing or ornament” as well as “magic”.[112]

The historical association of the inscribed object with magical practice traces its roots back to antiquity. The introduction of Latin Christianity to Britain inevitably produced “charms” that sought to harness the miraculous power of the Church for domestic and military ends.[113] In everyday practice such charms were carved into foodstuffs (apples, bread, cheese, wafers) that could be consumed, as well as wood, wax and other materials used as portable amulets and talismans. In English literary narratives, however, the predominant object whose inscription lends it preternatural powers is the weapon. In the late Anglo-Saxon poem *Solomon and Saturn*—immediately following a brilliant passage in which animated letters of the alphabet fight the devil (84–145)—the written word is literally weaponised as Solomon invokes a doomed man with a “bewitched blade” (*bill forscrifeð*) on which diabolical forces have written “baleful letters” (*bealwe bocstafas*, 168). The same principle applies in a benevolent form when King Richard wields a spear inscribed with the name of God (5719–5720) while fighting the Saracens in the late medieval romance *Richard Coer de Lyon*. Here we encounter a fictional instance of actual historical practices among crusaders, who inscribed Christ’s name or other divine names on swords and shields for additional protection against the perils they would encounter.[114]

In a literary context, the miraculously empowered inscribed weapon also works to cast the military foe as demonic force with malevolent magical powers of its own, reinforcing the crusading notion that military combat was also spiritual warfare. In the case of the crusader romance, the demon steeds conjured by the Sultan’s necromancer for the single combat between Saladin and Richard (5479–5547) participate in a long Western tradition of linking magical knowledge, and in particular magical writing, with the Orient and the cultural Others associated with it. Belief in the apotropaic function of the divine name, for instance, was part of both Christian and Jewish folk customs and esotericism, a fact not lost on medieval scholars interested in Solomonic magic. In fact, the magical pre-eminence granted by Christian thinkers to Hebrew as the primal language of Creation, even before the spread of pseudo-Solomonic grimoires in the twelfth century, is one reason why contemporary scholars can entertain the possibility that the “runification” of the sword hilt in *Beowulf* might have been imagined by an Anglo-Saxon poet as what we might call a “Hebraication”.[115] Over the course of the Middle

Ages, Arabic scholarship was instrumental in transmitting Hellenistic and Jewish esoterica and was credited with advances in astrological knowledge passed on by Iberian scholars. By the late medieval period, the archetypal ritual magician who emerges in literature with his mysteriously inscribed instruments, magical seals and ritual objects draws on this Orientalist mystique.

The medieval English tradition illustrates this most dramatically with the figure of Nectanabus in its versions of the legend of Alexander the Great. The Auchinleck Manuscript's *King Alisaunder* (1330) and John Gower's version in *Confessio Amantis* (1390) both present the Egyptian magician using astrological knowledge and a wax effigy on which he inscribes the queen's name to perform his magic. The prevalence of the inscribed object as a feature of imagined and actual occult rituals—where the linguistic obscurity of the inscription to the average reader attests to its arcane power—suggests that even as writing became more common in medieval England, the inscribed object's ability to materialise invisible forces remains part of the cultural imagination.

Perhaps the best illustration of this point is the medieval English poetic depiction of Belshazzar's Feast, a biblical scene of inscription from the Book of Daniel.[116] The frequency of English literary depictions of the prophetic writing on the wall during a sacrilegious feast thrown by King Belshazzar (son of Nebuchadnezzar and the last king of Babylon) is striking. The scene appears first in the Old English poem *Daniel*, which imagines an angel's hand writing in red ink on the wall, inscribing "crimson letters" (*baswe bocstafas*, 723) that mystify the King and the "city-dwellers" (*burhsittendas*, 723).[117] However, the scene is also mentioned repeatedly in late medieval poems by major Middle English poets.[118] The most arresting depiction for scholars interested in inscriptionality occurs in *Cleanness*, one of the lesser known poems by the Pearl-poet responsible for the well-known Middle English poems *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl*. In contrast to the vague references to "writing" made by Gower and Chaucer in their versions of the tale, *Cleanness*'s dramatic depiction of the mysterious hand engraving the prophecy into a wall emphasises the physical force required for such an inscription:

In þe palays pryncipale upon þe playn wowe,	In the principal palace upon the bare wall,
In contrary of þe candelstik þat clerest hit schyned,	Over against the candlestick that shone the clearest,
Þer apered a paume, wyth poyntel in	There appeared a hand with a stylus

in its fyngres,	fingers,
Þat watz grysly and gret, and grymly he wrytes;	It was horrible and huge, and, terrifyingly, it wrote;
Non oþer forme bot a fust faylande þe wryste,	No other form but a clenched hand cut off at the wrist,
Pared on þe parget, *purtrayed lettres*.	Cut into the plaster, penned letters.
[…]	[…]
Ay biholdand þe honde til hit hade al graven,	Beholding the hand until it had engraved,
And rasped *on þe roȝ woȝe runisch sauez*.	And scratched on the rough wall, mysterious words.
When hit þe scrypture hade scraped *wyth a* scrof penne,	When, with a rough pen, it had scraped the text,
As a coltor in clay cerves þo forȝes,	As a coultor carves rows into clay,
Þenne hit vanist verayly and voyded of syȝt;	Then, truly, it vanished, disappeared from sight;
Bot þe lettres bileved ful large upon plaster.	But the letters remained, written large on the wall.
(1531–1536, 1544–1546, emphasis ours)	

With verbs like *paren, raspen, graven, scrapen* and the rough (*scrof*) stylus, the poet's representation of engraving as a form of violence to the wall contributes to the scene's horror. Here, again, the "runish" words, clearly magical yet uninterpretable to pagan necromancers, require the expert reader, in this case the prophet Daniel. Moreover, the drama of the prophecy's application and its effect on the witnesses directs the audience's attention beyond the mere translation of what the "runish" words say. The poem's focus on the act of inscription evokes a further question, one raised more generally by inscriptions as physical artefacts and unique rhetorical acts in a pre-print environment: what kind of force had the power to effect the inscription and to whom is it addressed?

2Public and Private

To inquire by whom and for whom an inscription is created requires us to consider the complex relationship between literary representation and historical practice when it comes to inscriptionality in medieval England. One case in point is civic epigraphy, a distinctly pre-medieval form of writing that English authors productively appropriated from the considerable corpus

of Latin texts they had inherited from antiquity. The public spaces of ancient Rome and the poleis of classical Greece were marked by a plethora of material inscriptions, among them plaques or incised pedestals accompanying dedicatory statues to name the honoured individual, engraved stone slabs incorporated into buildings to identify them as temples or public bathhouses, recent decrees published on noticeboards, and a variety of graffiti ranging from the poetic to the defamatory. The number of civic inscriptions that have come down to us from the Greco-Roman world leaves no doubt that the classical public space was text-bearing. Unsurprisingly, this pronounced "epigraphical habit" found its way into Latin and Greek literature as well.[119]

Early medieval England, in contrast, did not develop an equally elaborate practice of writing in and for the civic sphere. Most of the surviving epigraphy from the Anglo-Saxon period was found on private objects and mainly indicated ownership. With the exception of ecclesiastical contexts and personal commemoration, public writing that was relevant to a larger citizen body is conspicuously absent from the extant collections.[120] Two main reasons may explain this lack of civic epigraphy in Anglo-Saxon England. First, it did not have urban structures of the size and density of Rome or Athens, where a large number of influential citizens who participated in the political and administrative life of the empire needed to be informed about important past and ongoing events. Second, and more importantly, Anglo-Saxon England lacked a lay aristocratic elite that was literate; the ability to compose and read texts was largely restricted to monasteries and churches, where clerics guarded their privilege more or less jealously.

When civic epigraphy does appear in Old English literature, in translations from the Latin such as *The Phoenix* and *Apollonius of Tyre*, it anticipates the role that inscriptionality will come to play in later medieval public life in England. The Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*, commonly thought to have been written in the eleventh century, is the oldest vernacular version of a narrative that probably originated in the fifth century.[121] Apollonius's quest to claim his rightful inheritance after he is driven from his kingdom is punctuated by various inscriptions marking the stages of his journey, a feature that draws attention to literacy and verbal wit as central to the eponymous hero's character, and indeed to the romance itself. The meta-textual aspects of inscriptions on statues, tombs and architecture also instruct the audience in the roles inscription can play as a form of public writing. Consequently, we will use an analysis of *Apollonius* as a

framework through which to elaborate various aspects of public writing in medieval British literature more generally.

First we should note that the statue erected for Apollonius in Tarsus highlights epigraphy's potential as a democratic use of text in a public space, as writing by and for the people. When Apollonius saves the city from a famine, the citizens (*ceaster-waran*, XV) express their gratitude by erecting a brass statue of the hero engraved with an account of his good deed:

> *hig worhton him ane anlicnesse of áre. þe on ðare stræte stod and mid ðare swiðran hand þone hwæte heold and mid þam winstran fet þa mittan træd, and þaron þus awriten: "Ðas gifu sealde seo ceasterwaru on Tharsum Apollonio þam tiriscan, forðam þe he þæt folc of hungre alesde and heora ceastre gestaðolode"*. (X)

> they wrought to him a statue of brass, which stood in the street, and with the right hand shed wheat, and with the left foot stood on the measure; and thereon thus wrote: "This gift gave the citizens of Tarsus to Apollonius the Tyrian, because he saved the people from starvation, and restored their city".

The poem's insistence on the plural *hig worhton* highlights this as a collective act, wrought by the will, and the resources, of the people. Their goal is to establish a public record that honours Apollonius and informs present and future passers-by *on ðare stræte* about his extraordinary deed with which he *heora ceastre gestaðolode*.

The Phoenix (ninth century) similarly features inscription as a way of marking the extraordinary in the life of a community. The poem resembles a long entry on the legendary bird in a bestiary infused with Christological allegory. It identifies the homeland of the Phoenix as "far from here to the east, in the best of lands" (*feor heonan* / *eastdælum on æþelast londa*, 1f.), a paradisiac place "removed from those who practise evil" (*afyrred* […] *manfremmendum*, 5f.). Consequently, the Phoenix cannot easily be observed in its natural habitat. Every now and then, however, it may be spotted when, after being reborn from its ashes, the Christ-like bird leaves the confines "of this earth" (*of þisse eorþan*, 349) to return to its heavenly home. On this occasion, throngs of people gather to watch the wonderous creature in its flight. Moreover, they

gewritum cyþað,	make it known in writing, marking it by hand
mundum mearciað on marmstane,[122]	in marble stone, the day and the season when it
hwonne se dæg ond seo tid dryhtum geeawe	was revealed to the multitude.

(332–334)

Having caught a glimpse of the exotic and the divine, the assembled witnesses note the date with an inscription in solid marble stone. Their precise chronicling, then, not only commemorates the extraordinary event for future reference, but also amalgamates the mythical and the historical. Ephemeral creature though it may be, the Phoenix is now attested to by a material record available to "the multitude". Their choice of material is not incidental. As Robert Henryson observes in his moral fable *The Lion and the Mouse* in the fifteenth century: "When it comes to grievances, men write in marble / I will not expound further / But king and lord know what I mean" (*For hurt, men wrytis in the marbill stane. / Mair till expone as now I lett allane / Bot king and lord may weill wit quhat I mene*, 1611–1613). We see a similar interest in material longevity in late medieval redactions of the Apocryphal legend of Adam and Eve, where Eve commands Seth to record the lives of his parents in tablets of clay and stone—to survive catastrophes of fire and water, respectively—so that their story may benefit all of humanity.[123]

The second important point *Apollonius* draws attention to is that the inscription on Apollonius's statue does more than act as an historical record, suggesting additional roles for inscriptionality in the public realm. The poem specifies that the text-bearing statue discharges the debt the citizens owe to the hero for his kind intervention; it is "a gift […] to Apollonius of Tyre" (*gifu* […] *Apollonio þam tiriscan*), but not one that he may carry away with him. Rather, the brass likeness of the hero forms a fixed part of the cityscape, materially incorporating the exile into a new community. Moreover, the statue and inscription may serve apotropaic purposes. Apollonius is not displayed standing still, but as a figure in action, his right hand dispensing wheat forever, perpetuating the hero's agency. In addition, not only his name appears in the inscription; the inscription also records what the statue alone cannot communicate: the happy outcome of Apollonius's benefaction, the restoration of the city, set down in material writing to ward off future famines.

We can see this aspect in other medieval accounts of public inscriptions: even as they function as records directed at the public, they are ultimately expressions of the might wielded by communal leaders, for better or for worse. One familiar example based on historical practice is the military monument, as when Marius erects a great stone attesting to his victory over the Picts in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136). J. S. P. Tatlock remarks: "That Geoffrey knew of some such

inscription then visible is hard to doubt. Roman inscriptions abound in north England [...]. Many more doubtless existed in his day, for the country folk have been in the habit of defacing them, as being not 'canny'".[124] Layamon scrupulously includes the erection of the inscribed stone in his *Brut* (c. 1190–1215), an early Middle English version of the chronicle:

he lette a-rœren anan. enne swuðe sœlcuð stan;	He let erect immediately a remarkable stone.
he lette þer-on grauen. sœlcuðe run-stauen;	On it he had engraved, strange characters;
hu he Rodric. of-sloh. & hine mid horsen to-droh;	How he killed Rodric and had him drawn apart by horses;
& hu he þa Peohtes. ouer-com mid his fœhtes;	And how he overcame the Picts, conquered by his fight;
Vp he sette þœne stan. ȝet he þer stondeð;	He set up that stone, and there it still stands;
swa he deð al swa longe. swa þa woreld stondeð.	So it will do so long as the world stands.

(4967–4972)

The repetition of *he lette* makes the inscribing and erecting of the stone an extension of Maurius's martial force. The ability to have a monument with such longevity erected as a public record and legacy is itself a reflection of a unique form of agency: the ability to shape the environment reflects a leader's ability to shape the course of communal history, not to mention his power to rend the individual bodies of foes such as Rodric. Tatlock's description of local resistance to the gesture, even centuries later, through the erasure of inscriptions indicates that the monument has an impact that outlasts its own historical moment and audience. The ruler's ability to "write history" is nowhere more evident than in his ability to execute his will on all material forms, be they lithic or human.

This logic is grotesquely apparent in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, when the crusader King hosts a "diplomatic" feast at which he presents each of the Sultan's earls with the boiled head of a prisoner of war: *Hys name faste above hys browe*, / *What he hyghte and of what kyn born* ("His name [was written] firmly on his forehead / What he was called and of what kin he was born", 3432f.). Since the diplomats have confirmed that Richard has captured their best, most noble warriors, and Richard himself demands that his servants slaughter *the Sarezynys of most renoun*, / *That be comen of the ryhcheste kynne* ("the Saracens of most

renown / That come from the richest families", 3414f.), the cannibal king literally devours his enemies' patrimony before their horrified eyes.

The first public inscription mentioned in *Apollonius* likewise provides an instructive example of the epigraphical strategies employed by a supreme ruler. King Antiochus has a riddle inscribed into a gate, ostensibly as a pious paternal act to invite potential suitors to vie for the princess's hand. However, the narrator immediately clarifies that this public writing is a sinister exercise in public manipulation, ensuring instead the elimination of all potential suitors so that the king might continue his incestuous assaults on his daughter undetected. Punctuating his inscription with the heads of both those suitors who fail and those who succeed in solving the riddle—"all the heads were set over the gate" (*þa heafda ealle wurdon gesette on ufeweardan þam geate*, V)—Antiochus's true message articulates the sovereign's power over the space and its inhabitants. Apollonius's terse reply to the King's inquiry if he has been informed about the rules of the game suggests that he grasps the implications even before he deciphers the riddle: "I know the ordinance, and I saw it at the gate" (*Ic can þone dom. & ic hine æt þam geate geseah*, VII).

The Old English *dom* means both "ordinance" and "judgement", suggesting that Apollonius recognises the double meaning of what he saw at the gate. He has read the decree ("the ordinance") and noted the gruesome results of the King's "judgement". The decree's placement as a portal inscription super-titled by the severed heads symbolically reinforces this message. The inscription of an architectural threshold visually illustrates the King's *dom* that hangs over the heads of all who cross the boundary into his domain. Given that neither the public, nor, for that matter, the princess,[125] ever benefit from Apollonius's act of interpretation, it would appear that this public inscription represents a private communication between those competing for power, with little regard for the community at large. As art historian Linda Safran observes in her analysis of public textual culture, we should not assume that public texts were intended to be comprehensible to everyone; in places that had more than one textual community, public texts were still targeted ones.[126]

Turning from *Apollonius* now to the private functions of inscriptions, we see inscription as a form of communication between individuals become more evident in English literature with the advent of the Norman Conquest in 1066. The Norman castle-building campaign that changed the English landscape was

accompanied by a new literary genre, the romance, whose fantastic narratives highlighted the material resources wielded by the aristocracy in the newly emerging feudal system of the early Middle Ages. Though the CRC database shows us that the number of inscribed objects in English romances is significantly more limited in comparison to their Continental analogues, the engraved ring offers an example of epigraphy's role as a way of signalling not only private property, but also private communication in the romance.[127] While rings with inscriptions are found already among the archaeological remains of the Anglo-Saxon period, the engraved ring first makes its literary appearance in Anglo-Norman romances and their Middle English heirs, such as the late thirteenth-century romance, *King Horn*.[128]

The ring engraved with the name of his beloved that Horn carries functions both as a private symbol between the two lovers and as a protective talisman, casting love itself as a magical force whose recollection protects the knight from becoming a physical and psychological casualty of war (565–580). Both *King Horn* and the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* (c. 1300) use the ring's portability and the immutable quality attributed to gold in order to make the ring the ultimate marker of identity, as well as a symbol of true love. The disguised Horn employs the ring to make his presence known to his beloved, whereas in *Guy of Warwick*, Felice learns that the pilgrim to whom she offered hospitality was in fact her long-suffering husband when a messenger brings her his ring:

The levedi tok that ring an hond	The lady took the ring in [her] hand
And loked theron and gan withstond	And looked up on it, and paused
The letters forto rede	To read the letters.
"Ow, certes", quath the levedi,	"Oh, truly", said the lady,
"This ring Y gaf mi lord Sir Gii	"This ring I gave my lord Sir Guy
When he fro me yede".	When he went from me".
(3469–3474)	

The return of the ring facilitates a hasty reunion that allows Guy to see his wife's face as he draws his last breath. Felice dies soon after, as he predicts she would. Yet, even as the lovers' deaths suggest their profound physical bond, the ring plot device reveals that it is the text-bearing sign of the relationship, not the lover's presence, that guarantees the authenticity of the encounter.

One particular form of inscriptionality in late medieval English literature that stems from the persistence of "courtly love" as a literary trope is the motto: a public text that appears in various mediums and whose role straddles the corporate and the individual body, the private and the public. Incorporated into coats of arms and other armorial bearings, the motto functions in

the public domain as a sign of familial, political or social affinity. One might think of it as a kind of branding. However, in literary contexts the motto, like the engraved ring, frequently announces forms of affinity while retaining the discretion demanded by *fins amors*. In the late medieval *Squire of Low Degree*, as the low-born hero sets out to earn a name for himself through feats of arms, the princess demands that he bear a blue shield to signal his fidelity, and furthermore:

In the myddes of your sheld ther shal be set *A ladyes head, with many a frete*; *Above the head wrytten shall be* *A reason for the love of me*: *Both O and R shall be therin,* *With A and M it shall begynne*. (211–216)[129]	In the middle of your shield there shall be set A lady's head, with many an ornament; Above the head shall be written A motto about your love for me: Both O and R shall be therein, With an A and M shall it begin.

As public writing that can send a private message, the motto exploits the ambivalence of the text. In particular, as a portable inscription the motto underlines that context is significant for meaningful interpretation. One might consider, for instance, scholarly investigations of the motto *De Mieulx en Mieulx* embroidered with precious stones on the gown of the mysterious Lady (line 310) whose clandestine love affair is the subject of John Lydgate's dream vision, *Temple of Glas* (c. 1400–1425). Scholars have combed historical documents for clues as to the betrothal or secret marriage Lydgate might have been referencing in his suggestive poem. Yet, even the fact that *De Mieulx en Mieulx* was the family motto of the influential Paston family during this time is insufficient to lay to rest the riddle posed by a literal reading of the poem.[130] As J. Allan Mitchell remarks, "if *The Temple of Glas* appears to 'go public' with private matters we can no longer identify, there is a way in which fresh documentary evidence (should it ever come to light) would not be enough to settle the text's meaning" for the poem is "designed to seduce its audience with a spectacle of a secret".[131]

Even as the motto, especially in a sartorial medium, represents a subjective, personal expression, and is, moreover, appended physically to its ostensible author, in literature it can render the bearer less rather than more legible to an audience. Chaucer's Prioress from *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1386–1400) is a most fitting example of this principle. In her General Prologue description, the motto engraved on her golden brooch, *Amore vincit omnia*, epitomes the puzzle she poses to audiences (GP 162). The Prioress

is a nun whose vocation it is to manifest divine love—what in Greek one would term *caritas*—but whose bearing, as described by Chaucer the Pilgrim-Narrator, suggests an interest in courtly love, better termed *eros*. In contrast to these nuanced Greek terms for different types of love, the Latin *amore* in the Prioress's motto cannot be so easily parsed, thereby suggesting that the inscription functions meta-textually here as a provocation that both invites and refuses interpretation.

As the diverse objects bearing mottos show, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witness a proliferation and diversification of the types of inscribed objects appearing in Middle English texts. While Old Testament, classical and military references continue to circulate, inscriptions now appear in more mundane domestic and secular circumstances: on baldachins, walls and stained glass windows, on a ceremonial mace, on embroidered sleeves and handkerchiefs, on a personal rosary and other forms of accessories.[132] This abundance may be due, in part, to the changing socio-historical contexts in which medieval authors were writing. The increasing literacy and resources of minor gentry and what we might now call the upper bourgeoisie in the late English Middle Ages meant that textual culture, including inscriptionality, was at the disposal of more members of society.

The extracodical output of one of Chaucer's more well-known fifteenth-century literary successors, John Lydgate, provides insight into the ubiquity of inscriptionality in late medieval urban and ecclesiastical contexts. Lydgate composed poems as parts of wall paintings, tapestries, and even pageant spectacles.[133] His *Soteltes at the Coronation Banquet*, for instance, were verses written on scrolls or tablets to accompany the sugar decorations (*sobteltes*) brought in with each course at the coronation banquet of the eight-year old Henry VI in 1429. We also find a variety of churches and secular buildings inscribed with Lydgate's poetry. The most remarkable among them is the Clopton chapel in Holy Trinity Church of Long Melford, in Lydgate's home county. The fifteenth-century chapel features six stanzas of Lydgate's *Lamentation of Mary Magdalene* painted on the girder supporting the lower ceiling at its west end, and twenty-six stanzas of his *Testament* carved into wooden plaques that run around the chapel just below the ceiling, most likely commissioned by a local lay benefactor.[134]

In *Piers Plowman* (1370–1390), William Langland takes particular aim at the worldly motives that could lurk behind the patronage of such ecclesiastical inscriptions. Having the absolved Lady Mead (Reward) of her sins in Passus Three, the Father-

Confessor suggests that in order to assure herself of a heavenly reward, she could provide the glass window for a church building and have her name engraved in it (3.048–050). The Dreamer quickly undermines the Confessor's proposition that such inscriptions merit divine favour:

Ac God to alle good folk swich gravynge	But God forbids the pious such engraving—
defendeth—	
To writen in wyndowes of hir wel dedes—	To write in windows of their good deeds—
An aventure pride be peynted there, and	A dangerous pride is painted there, and the
pomp of the world;	pomp of the world;
For God knoweth thi conscience and thi	For God knows your consciences and natural
kynde wille,	disposition,
And thi cost and thi coveitise and who the	And your circumstances, and desires, and who
catel oughte.	owes you goods.
Forthi I lere yow lordes, leveth swiche	Therefore, I advise you lords, leave such
w[*ityng*]*es*—	writings—
To writen in wyndowes of youre wel dedes […]	To write in windows of your good deeds […]

(3,064–072)[135]

Seen alongside the ubiquity of inscriptionality in the late medieval environment, Langland's condemnation of the creation of public texts as a function of private interests raises questions about whether English perceptions of inscriptionality changed over time. The proliferation of inscriptionality, not unlike to the exponential increase of texts and tweets in our own time, reconfigures the value of the text in society and may thereby also modify the concept of the author.

3Inscriptionality and the Rise of English Literary Tradition

In our final section, we explore how inscription in late medieval English literature comes to represent the literary text itself. We particularly attend to the popular dream vision genre that played a central role in the emerging vernacular English literary tradition. One fascinating poem that begs for more scholarly attention is the fifteenth-century *The Assembly of Ladies* (c. 1470–1480), an allegorical account of a *cour amoreuse* noted for the

rare presence of a female narrator. Related to this female presence and unusual among the otherwise conventional features of this poem is the detail that the petitions of complaint brought to Lady Loyalty by the ladies unfortunate in love are mottos embroidered on their sleeves. Loyalty's messenger Perseverance explains the court's instructions:

Al youre felawes and ye must com in blewe,	You and your companions must come in blue,
Everiche yowre matier for to sewe,	One and all, to petition for your case,
With more, whiche I pray yow thynk upon,	What's more, which I pray you remember,
Yowre wordes on yowre slevis everichon.	Your mottoes [should be] on each of your sleeves.
(116–119)	

With the delightful play upon the homophonic verbs *seuen*, linking "to sew" with "to petition", the author turns the fifteenth-century fashion in England and France of embroidering devices and mottoes in French on the sleeves of garments into a form of legal writing. Consequently, while the first inscription to appear is referred to as *enbrowdid* (85), these needlecraft terms are then replaced with verbs that establish the inscriptions as utterances: forms of "to say" appear thrice (207, 307, 488), *compleyne* once (590) and "to write" eight times (308, 364, 583, 597, 616, 627, 645, 659, 667). Only in the materially elaborate description of Lady Loyalty's canopy does the narrator remind us of the materiality of the inscription by observing the motto was [*w*]*rought with the nedil ful straungely* / […] / *With grete lettres, the better for to shewe* ("wrought with a needle ingeniously […] with large letters, so as to be more noticeable", 487–490). More frequently, the mottos are identified with juridical texts: *The first lady, beryng in hir devise* / *Sanz que jamais, thus wrote she in hir bille* ("The first lady, bearing in her motto / 'Without ever (giving cause)', thus she wrote in her petition", 582f.).

The effect of the legal term "bill", even in the metaphorical context of the courtly game, draws attention to the frequently gendered nature of textual communities. By juxtaposing the realm of textile production conventionally associated with femininity with the texts circulating in the masculine world of the court and parliament, the poem invites us to consider what access lay women had to inscriptionality as a form of expression. Moreover, the legal metaphor reorients the nature of the utterance itself, transforming it from a symbolic language linked with mystification, as we have seen above, into a speech act that declares, even reveals, a truth otherwise invisible.[136]

In this sense, the embroidered sleeves of Loyalty's petitioners recall Philomela, a famous mythological antecedent from the lists of unfortunate women popularly compiled by late medieval poets; a figure, moreover, whose revenge makes her the archetype for women's inscriptional practices. In his own martyrology of famous women harmed by the cads of literary history, a dream vision titled *The Legend of Good Women* (c. 1380), Chaucer makes Philomela's association with inscriptionality explicit:

This woful lady lerned hadde in youthe	This woeful lady had studied in her youth
So that she werken and enbroude couthe,	So that she could work and embroider,
And weven in hire stol the radevore	And weave the tapestry in her frame
As it of wemen hath be woned yore.	As it was women's custom in the past.
[…]	[…]
She coude eek rede and wel ynow endyte,	She could also read and compose well enough,
But with a penne coude she nat wryte.	But with a pen she could not write.
But letters can she weve to and fro,	But letters she could weave to and fro,
So that, by that the yer was al ago,	So that, by the end of the year,
She hadde ywoven in a stamyn large	She had woven a large tapestry
How she was brought from Athenes in a barge,	How she was brought from Athens in a barge,
And in a cave how that she was brought;	And how to a cave she was brought;
And al the thyng that Tereus hath wrought,	And the things that Tereus wrought,
She waf it wel, and wrot the storye above,	She wove it well, and wrote the story above,
How she was served for hire systers love.	What she went through because she loved her sister.
(7,2350–2365)	

Chaucer's specification that Philomela communicated with words, not images, along with his assertion that Philomela's loom easily compensates for the fact that she has not learned how to use a pen, offers inscriptionality as a solution to women's exclusion from manuscript culture. If we accept that the anonymous fifteenth-century author of *The Assembly of Ladies* inherited this conventional association of women producing textiles in place of texts,[137] then the female narrator's refusal to apply a motto to the blue dress she dons for her visit to Loyalty's court might be explained by considering that the poem itself takes the place of her motto. Her instrument of choice, she asserts, is her pen, and her audience broader than the gynocentric sewing circle.

We conclude this chapter by examining Britain's most

renowned English author, Geoffrey Chaucer, to suggest that inscriptionality in late medieval English literature uses visual, material culture to interrogate the nature of literary authorship. The craft evident in the production of inscriptions as visual artefacts draws attention to the value attributed to the texts themselves. We see Lydgate identify poetry with the sleeve motto when the narrator of his *Troy Book* (early fifteenth century) complains that he has no rhetorical "flower / Nor rich colours, stones or jewels", bare as he is "of all cleverness / Through crafty speech to embroider Criseyde's sleeve" (*flour*, / *Nor hewes riche, stonys nor perré* […] *of alle coriousté* / *Thorugh crafty speche to enbroude with* [Criseyde's] *sleve*, 2,4725–4729). His use of the term *crafty* plays with the definition of "craft" as the handicraft he has just invoked, while simultaneously exploiting the term's association with both dexterity and trickery, thereby cleverly maintaining an ambivalence towards the heroine, whose true nature was the subject of so much medieval poetic debate.[138]

Chaucer's dream visions, in particular, use inscriptionality to engage with epistemological and hermeneutical questions related to authorship. Whereas most dream visions employ idealised landscape settings—the *locus amoenus* of love-visions—Chaucer's dreamers frequently explore elaborately crafted architectural environments displaying inscriptions of famous literary texts. In *The Book of the Duchess* (1369–1372) the dreamer initially finds himself in a beautiful chamber well fitted with windows depicting the Fall of Troy (322f.; 326f.) and adorned with a fresco:

And alle the walles with colours fyne *Were peynted, both text and glose,* *Of al the Romaunce of the Rose.* (332–334)	And all the walls with fine colours Were painted, [with] both the text and gloss, Of the entire *Romance of the Rose*.

The House of Fame (1379–1380) expands a similar setting in Book One into an extensive ekphrastic sequence. The dreamer's account of famous classical scenes painted and engraved on the walls of a temple of Venus made of glass (120) creates the impression of entering a manuscript, a sense confirmed by an inscription of the opening lines of the *Aeneid*:

But as I romed up and doun, *I fond that on a wall ther was* *Thus writen on a table of bras*: *"I wol now synge, yif I kan,* *The armes and also the man* *That first cam, thurgh his destinee,*	But as I roamed up and down, I found that on a wall there was Thus written on a tablet of brass: "I will now sing, if I can, [Of] the arms and also the man That first came, because of his destiny,

Fugityf of Troy contree, *In Itayle, with ful moche pyne* *Unto the strondes of Lavyne".* (140–148)	Fugitive of Troy's country, In Italy, with much suffering To the streams of Lavinia".

The ekphrasis that follows, with references to both painted and engraved images, proceeds for several stanzas (151–292), until the dreamer reaches Virgil's account of Dido and Aeneas. At this point, the poem executes a dramatic volta: *But let us speke of Eneas, / How he betrayed hir, allas* (293f.), which invokes Ovid's contrasting sympathetic portrayal of Dido in the *Heroides*. The accompanying switch to direct speech draws attention to the tension between Virgilian and Ovidian narratives, an instability in a foundational story for English literary culture.

Chaucer's *House of Fame* progressively erodes the authority of textual tradition through its elaboration of the diverse materials bearing inscriptions. At the outset of the poem, the Virgilian brass tablet depends on our assumption that the extracodical text represents a collective legacy, where the materials and labour required to produce it manifest the *auctoritas* attributed to the utterance. The *matière* underscores the cultural significance of the *sens*. However, Chaucer's subsequent invocation of contrasting perspectives on Dido, his challenge to the reader to *[r]ede Virgile in Eneydos / Or the Epistle of Ovyde* (378f.) threatens to make the brass inscription analogous to a false epitaph. Dido's direct speech lamenting *wikke*[*d*] *Fame* (349) begins Chaucer's inquiry into the arbitrariness of cultural legacy in a society still heavily invested in the intellectual tradition passed down from the great authors of the past.

Chaucer deploys inscriptionality to illustrate this point again in Book Three when he encounters a giant boulder that he must climb to reach Fame's Palace. The dreamer wonders what kind of stone it is, "for it shone like glassy alum, but more brightly" (*For hyt shoon lyk alum de glas, / But that hyt shoon ful more clere*, 1123–1125). When he discovers that the "congealed material" (*congeled matere*) is "a rock of ice and not of steel" (*a roche of yse, and not of stel*), the dreamer exclaims on the precariousness of Fame's abode (1130). While the precarity of Fame's house has literary precedents, Chaucer uniquely imagines this hill of ice as also covered with inscriptions, making it quite literally a "foundational" text:

Tho sawgh I al the half ygrave *With famous folkes names fele,* *That had iben in mochel wele,* *And her fames wide yblowe.*	There I saw half [of it] engraved With many names of famous people, That have been in great well-being, And their fame widely known.

But wel unnethes koude I knowe	But with great difficulty could I discern
Any lettres for to rede	Any letters in order to read
Hir names by; for, out of drede,	Their names; for, certainly,
They were almost ofthowed so	They were almost thawed so
That of the lettres oon or two	One or two of the letters
Was molte away of every name,	Of every name was melted away,
So unfamous was woxe hir fame.	So obscure had grown their reputations.
(1136–1146)	

The deceptively stable appearance of ice as a material for inscription gestures towards a vulnerability in textual tradition, represented here by the vanishing names of those who once had fame. Furthermore, the dreamer's curious qualification that the names were *molte awey with hete*, rather than *awey with stormes bete* makes their fate an inevitability, rather than a catastrophe striking an unlucky few (1150). Meanwhile, the names on the northern side of the hill remain "as fresh as if men had written them here that same day" (*as fressh as men had writen hem here* / *The selve day ryght*), preserved not by merit but by the felicity of being in the shade of Fame's palace (1156f.).

This unusual image of inscriptions melting begs interpretation. Melting matter could evoke the erasable wax tablet that was a part of schooling and everyday scholarly life for the medieval audience, a symbol that, according to Florence Bougne, haunts late medieval depictions of vernacular engravings as metaphors for writing.[139] Alternately, Kathy Cawsey makes a compelling case for the hill of ice as a reference to popular manuscripts damaged by use or preserved by neglect, thereby again drawing attention to the vagaries of cultural transmission.[140] We would argue, however, that since Book Three ends with the circulation of utterances disarticulated from their sources in the House of Rumour, the instability of the *matière* here does not erase the utterance itself, but rather the name of its author, thus destabilising the relation between the verse-maker and his verbal artefact. On the one hand, this anticipates the poem's presentation of the fickleness of Fame that immediately follows; on the other, it participates in a larger metatextual question that haunts the poem: the question of authorship and authority.

In other words, what is at stake is not the precarity of textual transmission, but rather the ambiguous conditions of the text's reception. What guarantees the text's value to its audience? Jacqueline Miller observes that Chaucer and his contemporaries were men who struggled "to find the proper balance between

their claims for poetic independence and their reliance on the sanction of traditional [...] *auctores*".[141] Chaucer's dreamer moves from the ekphrasis of Book One's classical legacy to the resonant chambers of Fame's palace—filled with images of *auctores* and extensively described, but noticeably lacking in inscriptions—to the final cacophony of Rumour's whirling house of twigs. In this last space, a place materially inimical to inscription, he reveals a world in which vast amounts of texts move, but without the authoring principle once required.

Recalling that Chaucer's poem participates in a long dream vision tradition, one might read the noise of Chaucer's House of Rumour as an acoustic analogue to the mysterious scripts on antediluvian tablets or Babylonian walls that require a miraculously empowered guide to decipher. Indeed, as we have seen, the prophetic model for the poetic genre depends on such a guide, whose revelation of both the source of the message and its correct interpretation elucidates the true state of things for the audience. Not surprisingly, then, Chaucer's dreamer turns with the clamouring crowd to witness the approach, albeit belatedly, of a figure who seems to be *a man of gret auctorite* (2157), his own version of St Erkenwald, if you will. However, it is an approach that extends infinitely; for this is the last line of the poem. Instead the audience is left alongside the dreamer in this house full of "pilgrims with satchels brimful of lies" (*pilgrimees* / *With scrippes bret-ful of lesinges*, 2121f.), a vastly expanded realm of authors and audiences that, many scholars have noted, anticipates the socially variegated world of Chaucer's greatest work, *The Canterbury Tales*.

Whether or not *The House of Fame* is intentionally unfinished, the end result is one typical of Chaucer in its refusal to offer what Anne Middleton calls "a pedagogic-progress plot: present your speaker with an ultimate vision or revelation which will make intellectual and emotional coherence of all that has led to it".[142] Middleton has famously argued that Chaucer and his Ricardian contemporaries developed "public poetry", where the speaker presents himself as "one worker among others" whose task it is "to find the common voice and to speak for all, but to claim no privileged position, no special revelation from God or the Muses, no transcendent status for the result".[143] In Chaucer's *House of Fame*, then, we can read his erosion of the "public text" inscribed on the monument as an effect of his early efforts to develop a form of "public poetry" charactered by immanent, worldly experience rather than posing as a transcendent, static "treasury of wisdom". This emerging notion of "public poetry" at the outset

of an English literary tradition executes a remarkable shift in perspective on how epigraphy generates meaning. Confronted with the inscribed object, the audience may no longer ask, "who had the power to incise this text, and what does this inscription mean?", but rather "what is the social currency of this text? Does the inscription in fact speak to me?"

While this chapter is dedicated to highlighting the particularities of narrated inscriptions in British literature, our overview nevertheless suggests that medieval Britain can be seen as a microcosm for how inscriptionality developed in the European West. We witnessed a steadily increasing variety of inscribed objects as literacy spread from the ecclesiastical domain in the early Middle Ages, was appropriated by secular courtly culture in the High Middle Ages and found its way into a late medieval urban landscape transformed by a post-feudal economy. Even in the face of these changes, literary texts from all of these periods frequently constructed inscribed artefacts as encounters with the past. Like the mysterious pagan grave in the heart of London's great cathedral in *St Erkenwald*, inscribed objects present traces of ancient civilisations while forcing us to recognise that the past cannot entirely be known or deciphered. This in turn incites us to inscribe ourselves in the material and textual world in ways that we hope will be legible to the future.

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Old French Narrated Inscriptions

With 6193 preserved manuscripts and 1072 identified medieval authors, Old French was the most influential vernacular language of the European Middle Ages. We use the term “Old French” to denote the linguistic varieties commonly known as *les langues d’oïl* situated north of the Croissant transition zone (including the British Isles) which separates them from the Old Occitan dialects (*les langues d’oc*) of southern France.[144] Old French was not only spoken and written in France and England, but also in Cyprus and the Holy Land, where French was the language of the ruling class for centuries. Even the Venetian Marco Polo used Old French to relate his travelogues,[145] which formed part of the immensely influential fourteenth-century Franco-Italian literary movement. Other vernacular European literary traditions were heavily influenced by the French corpus. The most important writers of Middle High German classicism, such as Wolfram von Eschenbach and Hartmann von Aue, for example, translated and transformed the Old French romances *Roman de Perceval ou Le conte du Graal* (c. 1180), *Erec et Enide* (c. 1170) and *Le roman d’Yvain ou du Chevalier au lion* (c. 1177), all written by Chrétien de Troyes. England’s most influential Arthurian text, Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, is based on his translation of French sources.

In this chapter we will gather significant passages of Old French literature, in order to classify them and to establish a tentative typology of narrated inscriptions, their multiple functions and possible interpretations.[146]

1On the Difference Between Real and Narrated Inscriptions

If we look at inscriptions in literary texts, we first of all have to take into consideration the important difference between historical inscriptions and inscriptions as features of a literary text. Their function, as well as the communicative situation they establish, is markedly different. Our first example, the report *Le devisement du Monde* (c. 1305) by Marco Polo can serve to

illustrate this. In his report, Marco Polo describes the Mongolian army, mentioning the inscribed golden tablets the soldiers carry with them. The inscription is cited literally.

> *Et en toutes ces tables y a ung commandement escript qui dit: "Par la force du grant dieu et de la grant grace qu'il a donné a nostre emperiere, le nom du Kaan soit benoist! Et tous ceux qui n'obeiront a lui soient mors et destruiz!"* (200, §80)

> And on all of these tablets there is an inscribed order that says: "By the force of the grand Lord and Grace that he gave our emperor, the name of Khan shall be praised! And everyone who will not be obedient will die and be destroyed!"[147]

Examining these tablets called *paizas* as historical artefacts,[148] we might ask to whom they were addressed. Whose message did they transmit? The *paiza* seems to address any enemy of the Khan, which could be a foreign soldier as well as any Chinese subject. In the first statement, where the Khan is praised, the addressee is invited to join in this praise (*le nom du Kaan soit benoit!*). In the second, the consequence of this common glorification is shown when the soldiers of the Mongolian army are declared as victors in so far as some of the addressees are threatened with death and destruction (*Et tous ceux qui n'obeiront a lui soient mors et destruiz!*). Possible enemies might have felt intimidated, while the soldiers of the Mongolian army might have felt assured and united by the identity proclaimed by the inscription. With such an artefact, the written words on the tablets replace the spoken word while simultaneously perpetuating it, thereby giving it more authority. Behind this written information we can identify the Khan himself, who appropriates the soldiers as part of his army. However, presented through the written medium, the information becomes independent of the Khan's presence. On some level, every inscription performs this absent presence, and thereby sustains the power of writing itself.

Moreover, the cited inscription takes on a different function once it is embedded in Marco Polo's text. It no longer addresses military adversaries, but, on the extra-diegetic level, it also addresses the (European) readers of the Old French text. What are they supposed to understand? For them, the inscription might signal the authenticity of the narrative. Since Marco Polo was writing about something that the readers did not know, he generously cites the inscription in its entirety, giving his report the appearance of truth and reliability. This difference between the inter- and the extra-diegetic addressees and readers of the inscription is at the core of the opposition between narrated and

real text-bearing artefacts. It is palpable also in texts that deal with entirely fictional inscriptions. Continuing in this vein, we will trace further texts that reflect this difference in various ways in order to explore the ambiguities of writing itself on the diegetic as well as on the extra-diegetic level.

2Narrated Inscriptions: Truth and Identity

Our next example is taken from *Perceval* (c. 1180). The eponymous hero receives a sword from the Fisher King, the guardian of the Castle of the Holy Grail:[149]

Que que il parloient ensi,
Un[s] vallés entre par la por[t]e
De la maison et si aporte
Une espee a son col pendue,
Si l'a al riche home rendue.
Et il l'a bien demie traite,
Si vit bien ou ele fu faite,
Car en l'espee estoit escrit.
Et avec che encore i vit
Qu'ele estoit de si bon achier
Que ja ne porroit depechier,
Fors que par un tot seul peril
Que nus ne savoit fors que cil
Qui l'avoit forgie et tempree.
(3130–3143)

While they were talking thus,
a boy came in through the door;
he was carrying a sword
hung round his neck,
and presented it to the nobleman.
He drew it half out of its scabbard,
and saw clearly where it was made,
for it was written on the sword.
And he also learned from the writing
that it was of such fine steel
that there was only one way
it could ever be broken,
which no-one knew except the one
who had forged and tempered it.[150]

The words of the inscription here are paraphrased. Only their content is narrated: the name of the smith and the nature of the steel. The concrete wording would not transmit further information here. In contrast to Marco Polo's tablet, the mere fact that the sword is inscribed is sufficient to connote that Perceval owns a very precious object.[151] Comparable to a brand name, its origin stands for the remarkable quality which distinguishes the object. The specific wording is not needed.

Thanks to its inscription the sword not only creates a giver-receiver connection between the Fisher King and Perceval, but also links Perceval and the sword's forger who, according to the text, is about to die and will never forge a sword like this again and, most importantly, is the only one who knows how the sword can be broken. Nonetheless, "[t]he reader's expectations that the sword will be of particular significance to the future exploits of Perceval are unfortunately frustrated by the incomplete state of Chrétien's text".[152] In this passage we find a first example where the inscription characterises the object as well as the possessor.

This double reference can be more complex when the inscription gives more information, as we will see in our next example.

In the *Romance of Horn* (c. 1170), the intricate love story between Horn and Rigmel by an author commonly called "Thomas", "son of immigrants from the Loire valley",[153] we encounter the following passage: *En sun poing tint le brant, ki fud clers et letrez; | Escrit i est li granz nuns de Deu de maiestez* ("in his fist he held the sword, which was lustrous and lettered, written on it was the name of the Lord the Almighty", 3181f.). The origin of the sword remains vague. Yet, the inscription still delivers valuable information by mentioning the name of the Lord. Even though the concrete wording is omitted the inscription indirectly legitimises the deeds committed with this sword and endows it with a Christian "identity".[154] The executed deeds with this weapon seem to be blessed: they have been committed "in the name of the Lord". Within the literary context, the inscription also provides hints to the current possessor of the sword: Gudmod. The proceedings make this obvious, as Gudmod illustrates the power of the sword to a pagan by first smashing a helmet and then decollating the pagan's head. Thus, the inscription reveals the "character" of the object as well as parts of the biography of every possessor of the sword, reaching even into the hero's possible future. Even though Gudmod does not fight further battles in the story, the reader knows that he is destined to be a great Christian warrior.

This biographical link between the inscribed object and a fictional character's life story can constitute an even more important part of the narrative. In Old French texts, rings are "often given to messengers as credentials, or [are] used for the same purpose as letters of introduction".[155] This is the case in Marie de France's Breton *Le Fresne* (c. 1165) in the passage where the mother of twins wraps one of her children in a brocade and ties an exquisite, inscribed ring to it.

En un chief de mult bon cheinsil	She carefully wrapped the child
envolupent l'enfant gentil	in a fine piece of fabric
e desus un paile roé;	and a silk cloth
sis sire li ot aporté	that she had brought
de Costentinoble u il fu;	from Constantinople,
unques si bon n'orent veü.	a finer one she had never seen.
A une piece d'un suen laz	To one of its laces
un gros anel li lie al braz.	she attached a large ring to her arm.
De fin or i aveit une unce;	Made of one ounce of pure gold
el chastun out une jagunce;	and adorned with a hyacinth
la verge en tur esteit letree.	the ring was inscribed.
La u la meschine iert trovee,	Wherever the girl would be found

bien sacent tuit veraiement
qu'ele est nee de bone gent.
(121–134)

everybody should know
that she is of noble birth.

Here, the ring functions as the bearer of a message of goodwill to the child's new family. Its inscription establishes her noble birth no matter where she might be found. Indeed, when the baby is discovered by a porter and his daughter later on, her noble descent is simply accepted. Even as a young woman, she takes the ring and the silk with her when she leaves the abbey with Gurun, a lord who is in love with her and has impregnated her. The inscribed object functions as permanent valuable guarantee of identity.

La meschine bien les guarda;
en un cofre les enferma.
Le cofre fist od sei porter,
nel volt laissier ne ubliër.
(313–316)

The girl took good care of it
and locked it in a safe
that she took with her;
she did not want to leave or forget it.

In *Le Fresne* again we can observe that it is unnecessary to cite the inscription: simply mentioning it is sufficient, since the readers of the text know about the ancestry of the little child. The information transmitted by the inscription on the level of the diegesis does not have to be given in full to be comprehensible on the extra-diegetic level. But what is the information then that is transmitted to the reader of the story? To the readers of *Le Fresne*, the inscription indicates the happy end of all upcoming events. The child might well be abandoned to a foreign world and an uncertain future, but the motif of the inscription anticipates a diegetic addressee of this inscription who will be able to react appropriately to the message and save the child.

This example of a narrated inscription illustrates our claim that an inscription can replace a spoken message and can thereby be understood by analogy with the oral communication: The words of the absent Khan are replaced by the inscription on the tablet, just as the words of the mother are replaced by the inscription on the ring. Even the inscribed name of the smith on the sword can be understood as equivalent for oral message. The artisan adds his name and thereby literally describes the object. In these cases, it is possible to imagine the act of speech behind the writing. Yet, as written word, the message becomes independent of its sender who might even remain vague, as it is the case when we read the name of the Lord on Gudmod's sword.

Furthermore, the literary context provides multiple levels of meaning every narrated inscription can adopt. It does not stand

for itself any longer as it is the case with any real inscription. In the context of the literary text, not only the diegetic reader is addressed but also the extra-diegetic reader for whom the inscription might add information not present explicitly within the inscription itself, as for example the quality of authenticity of Marco Polo's report as we have shown above, or the happy ending of the story of the foundling. Thus, this level of meaning might reveal parts of the content of the story. It can also negotiate the possibilities of epigraphy as a medium, as the following examples demonstrate.

Epitaphs in particular show a concern for the power of the written word.[156] Jan Assmann has pointed out that most of the inscriptions on tombstones, especially in ancient Egypt, can be understood as a message sent by the dead person to the world left behind.[157] In this case, too, the writing directly replaces spoken word that cannot be pronounced.

In the *Histoire de la Belle Melusine ou de Lusignan* (Jean d'Arras, 1393) King Elynas is murdered by his daughters Melusine, Melior and Palestine. In the story, this scandalous event is recounted on his tombstone: *un tablel d'or ou toute l'aventure dessusdicte estoit escripte* (14). Yet, due to the circumstances of this death not the murdered King is responsible for the inscription on the tombstone, but his wife. Can the inscription nonetheless be understood like a message?:

> *Et aux piez de la tombe mist une ymage d'albastre de son hault et de sa figure, sibel et si riche que plus ne povoit, et tenoit la dicte ymage un tablel d'or ou toute l'aventure dessusdicte estoit escripte*. (14)
>
> And at the bottom of the tomb she put an alabaster image of his height and silhouette, beautiful and rich like no other, and said image held a golden tablet where the whole adventure was inscribed.

Again the inscription is only mentioned, not cited. This is possible because the readers are familiar with the story (called *aventure*) and are therefore well-informed of the content of the message. By commissioning the epitaph for her dead husband, the queen addresses the former community of the king and thereby reunites it.[158] Yet obviously, on the diegetic level the inscription about the King's death has more functions: it restores the memory of the dead King, it accuses his murderers, and it also communicates his wife's mourning. This last aspect is further underlined by the image (*ymage*) of the King that his wife adds to the inscription, which emphasises the painful absence of her beloved husband. So far, the inscription functions indeed like a written message sent by the wife to every beholder of the tombstone.

Yet, within the literary context a further level of meaning is present. Since it is possible for the wife to pronounce her accusation directly, the written word does not replace the spoken one. We can even imagine the wife beside the tombstone repeating the epigraph, and it is precisely this parallel that makes the difference between the spoken and the written word obvious. Here, the inscription does not allow the message to cross the confines of space. It first of all serves to establish and fix specific content. The wife wants to ensure the memory of her husband, and at the same time to testify to the brutal circumstances of his death. It is in written word that these contents can be conserved, and the epitaph is the classic place to establish basic information about the deceased. Since the King is murdered by his own daughters whom the mother will punish for the deed by cursing and transforming them partly into animals the epigraphical narration of the "aventure" serves as a final statement on this familial tragedy. Here written word establishes the truth.

In a sophisticated interpretation, one might even think of the idea that the indicated narration on the tombstone (which is a repetition of the story itself) inaugurates a *mise-en-abyme*, an endless story within the story. This construction is all the more interesting as it reflects the content of Jean's tale, where the curse of the malformed body is transmitted and thus repeated over generations. The durability of this curse might even be indicated by the circumstance that the narration of the murder is carved in stone.

The effort of linking the inscription to the idea of truth gains further weight if we look at three other inscriptions that are directed toward the future and thereby convey prophetic content. Martti Nissinen defines this foreshadowing element of inscriptions explicitly as "prophetic activity".[159] In *La Quête du Saint-Graal* (1225) when the knights take their first look at the chairs of the Round Table, they discover on the *Siege Perillex* (88,7) the following inscription: *iiii.c.anz et .liiii.a aconpliz aprés la Passion Jesucrist. Au jor de Pentecoste doit ciz sieges trover son mestre* ("454 years have passed after the Passion of Jesus Christ. On Pentecost these chairs shall find its master", 88,9–11). As the interjection of the attendees makes clear, the inscription announces a "marvellous adventure" to come (*Par foi, ci a merveilleuse aventure!*, 88,13), an agency Ott and Pantanella describe as the "narrative potential" of inscriptions.[160] Later on, Gaaland, the son of Lancelot, will indeed sit on the inscribed chair whose prophetic powers are quasi-sacred. Lancelot decides to cover the text-bearing seat as long as the prophecy is not fulfilled

and thereby separates it from the rest of the scene by saying: *"Et ge vodroie bien que nus ne veist mes hui cez letres devant que cil sera venuz qui ceste aventure doit achever"* (88,19–20).

Our next example points into the same direction. It is taken from *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier de la Charrete* by Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1177), where we also encounter the topos of the epitaph. When Lancelot enters the cemetery on his way to rescue the Queen of Logres, he discovers names engraved on the tombstones; they are names of knights that will rest in those tombs once they are dead.

El cemetire aprés le mainne	[The monk] led him through the cemetery
Antre les tres plus beles tonbes	among the most imposing tombs
Qu'an poïst trover jusqu'a Donbes	that could be found as far as Dombes
Ne de la jusqu'a Panpelune;	or as Pamplona, each engraved
Et s'avoit letres sor chascune	to show for whom the tombs were saved
Qui les nons de ces devisoient	with writing to identify
Qui dedanz les tonbes girroient.	the names of those therein to lie.
Et il meïsmes tot a tire	The knight himself, upon his own,
Comança lors les nons a lire	read out the names as they were shown,
Et trova: "Ci girra Gauvains,	discovering "here will lie Gawain,
Ci Looys, et ci Yvains."	here Lionel, and here Yvain."
(1856–1866)	

Instead of testifying to the past, the inscription tells of events yet to come and marks the spots where Lancelot and each of the other knights "will lie" (*girra*). When, some verses later, Lancelot discovers the most splendid tomb of all and the monk tells him that it is impossible to see the inside, he reads its elaborate inscription:

Et letres escrites i a	These words are written on the stone:
Qui dïent: "Cil qui levera	"He who can raise this stone alone
Cele lanme seus par son cors	with his own body's strength shall then
Gitera ces et celes fors	release the women and the men
Qui sont an la terre an prison,	who are imprisoned in the land
Don n'ist ne clers ne gentix hon	where foreign serfs and lords are banned
Des l'ore qu'il i est antrez;	from leaving once they enter.
N'ancor n'en est nus retornez.	Nobody has returned to date.
Les estranges prisons retienent,	In that land strangers are detained;
Et cil del païs vont et vienent	as prisoners they have remained,
Et anz et fors a lor pleisir."	whereas the natives come and go
(1899–1909)	at their discretion to and fro."

This inscription, too, serves to announce upcoming events since

Lancelot will indeed be the one to raise the stone and to deliver the captives from Logres. Yet, the mere prophetic quality of the written word is extended here as this example adds a new quality to our collection of inscriptions. Here we have not only an inscribed object, but an inscribed place. The inscription is of course engraved into the surface of an object (the tombstone), but as the tombstone belongs to a special place, the inscription automatically characterises the place, not only the object. To the reader it becomes obvious that Lancelot stands at the border to the kingdom of the dead.[161] However, instead of entering it, the encounter declares him a future rescuer. This vicinity to the borders of life, together with the prophetic content, equips the inscription with a special allure. It takes on the features of an almost divine interjection. Furthermore, the fact that the inscription is quoted at length reinforces here the illusion of a speaking voice. Its message does not only announce the place of a future grave but it concerns and predicts Lancelot's life. Astonishingly, here the written word is endowed with the qualities of the spoken word and yet, at the same time, serves to communicate the truth. This combination only seems possible thanks to the somehow divine appearance of the inscription.

For the extra-diegetic reader, the same words might even convey more than just information about the hero. As prophecy they help to create suspense and invite the reader to anticipate how Lancelot will realise the predicted events. This aspect even is a specific aesthetic feature of prophetic inscriptions, as our next example will show.

Interestingly, the mere prophetic quality of the written word also functions if the inscription predicts the future in a negative rather than positive way—in the form of a warning. In the Romance *Merlin* (1210), attributed to Robert de Boron, the hero comes across a cemetery where he reads the following words on a cross: *Os tu, chevaliers errans qui vas querant aventures? Je te déflenc que tu n'ailles de chi pres dou chastiel. Et sache que elles ne sont mie legieres a un chevalier* ("do you dare, erring knight, who is seeking adventures? I advise against you going to the castle; know that the adventures are not easy to complete", 2, 44).

Although the addressee is easy to identify, here again the speaker remains some-how absent. Yet, the warning does not necessarily allude to a divine speaker. Even though the words appears to be as truthful as the words on the tombstone, the inscription on the cross is either miraculous or mundane. Its provenance is ambiguous. This is all the more the case as Merlin allows himself to ignore the warning. He decides to continue on

his way: *Lors se met outre la crois et s'en vait grant oirre viers le chastiel* ("he overrides the cross and walks with haste toward the castle", 2,44). At this moment the aesthetic quality of the narrated inscription becomes fully obvious: as a warning, it serves not only to create suspense but it lends to this suspense the qualities of the uncanny.

3Narrated Inscriptions: The Lie

While in the examples cited so far, the truthfulness of the writing was central, our next example questions this claim. If inscriptions, particularly in materials like stone, are associated with statements guaranteed to be truthful, what do we make of the motif of the false grave? We encounter this motif in *Flore et Blancheflor* (c. 1160), one of the most popular romances on the Middle Ages, translated from Old French into Middle High German, Middle English, Old Norse, Italian, Greek and Castilian. Via a sophisticated sepulchre, Flore's father makes his son believe that his love, Blancheflor, is dead, because he wants to hinder him from marrying her. The inscription on the tombstone is fairly expressive and central to the story:[162] *Li gist la bele Blanceflor | A qui Flores ot grant amor* ("here lies the beautiful Blanceflor | whom Flores loved with all his heart", 664f.).[163] On the diegetic level, the reader of this inscription, Flore, is supposed to trust in the truthfulness that the inscription normally guarantees, which means accepting the death of his beloved. The extra-diegetic reader, in contrast, knows that the father is attempting to deceive the young lover. Not the person's real life data is engraved, but the reliability of the data itself is used to deceive the beholder of the grave.

In this scenario of deceit, not only the deceiver is culpable, but writing itself is put into question, since it can be used to manipulate so easily. On the extra-diegetic level, the reader might feel invited to associate the false grave with arguments against the written word common since antiquity. In *Phaidros*, Socrates explains to his friend that whoever believes that something clear and certain would come out of writing is highly foolish, since letters cannot answer questions and thereby enter into a dialogue necessary for understanding and truth.[164]

This reflection stands in direct opposition to the examples cited above, where writing assures reliable content and can even create reality with a somehow prophetic and divine power. On the one hand, then, we encounter passages where the written

word seems to guarantee certainty, and on the other hand the epitaph in *Flore et Blancheflor* questions the reliability of writing itself.[165] We next consider how these two assumptions can be combined into a broader observation on the role of writing based on narrated inscriptions in medieval texts.

4Closing Remark: Writing as a System of Signs

Instead of seeing a contradictory opposition between the examples of narrated inscriptions cited first and the story of the false tombstone inscription in *Flore et Blancheflor* where writing communicates a lie, we would like to claim that the motif of narrated inscriptions in itself reflects on the ambiguous power of writing,[166] even though this meditation is not made explicit in the various, mostly literary texts.[167]

This ambiguity gets even more complex when it concerns not only the medium of writing but the meaning of specific literary texts, which leads to our last example. In the case of narrated inscriptions, we can identify a further and final aspect: an inscription is also an elegant way for an author to create intertextual relations. An outstanding example can be found in one of the most prominent texts of the Middle Ages.[168] In *Le Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1230) the author also mentions inscriptions. When written words are described for the first time, they appear as a commentary to images that they explain. The narrator approaches the rose garden and says:

Quant j'oi un poi avant alé,	When I had gone ahead thus for a little,
Si vi un vergier grant et lé, *Tot clos de haut mur bataillié,*	I saw a large and roomy garden, entirely enclosed by a high crenelated wall,
Portret dehors e entaillié *A maintes riches escritures.* (128–133)	sculptured outside and laid out with many fine inscriptions.

In contrast to these, the main and central inscription of this romance appears without further images. When the narrator gets to the fountain in the middle of the garden he describes the following:

Si ot desus la pierre escrites, *El bort amont letres petites,* *Qui disoient, iluec desus* *Estoit morz li biaus Narcisus.* (1433–1436)	and in the stone, on the border of the upper side, had cut small letters saying that there the fair Narcissus died.

Even though the myth of Narcissus might well have been familiar to Guillaume's readers, the narrator adds a short moral, which tells of Echo's despised love as well as Narcissus' beauty and vanity. The narrator concludes by saying:

Dames, cest essample aprenez,	You ladies who neglect your duties toward your
Quivers vos amis mesprenez;	sweethearts, be instructed by this exemplum,
Car, se vos les lessiez morir,	for if you let them die, God will know
Dex le vos savra bien merir.	how to repay you well for your fault.
(1505–1508)	

This moral message is important since it alarms the diegetic reader:

Quant li escrit m'ot fet savoir	When the inscription had made clear to me
Que ce estoit trestot por voir	that this was indeed
La fontaine au bel Narcisus,	the true fountain of the fair Narcissus,
Je me suis trez un poi en sus;	I drew back a little,
Que dedenz n'ousai esgarder,	since I dared not look within.
Ainz començai a coarder,	When I remembered
Quant de Narcisus me sovint,	Narcissus and his evil misfortune,
Cui malement en mesavint;	I began to be afraid.
(1509–1516)	

As in the other epitaphs cited above, the name of Narcissus inscribed in the stone indicates the place of the grave. This place serves to commemorate the dead, in this case, a character from classical mythology. This death is problematic since it is the result of a punishment by the gods, which prompts the narrator to cite the case of Narcissus as a negative example, useful especially to women. Nonetheless, we learn that even a man, the male narrator of Guillaume's romance, feels addressed: he hesitates with fear (*Ainz començai a coarder*) as he feels that Narcissus's destiny will be his own as soon as he looks into the fountain. He too will die of unfulfilled love. Indeed, Guillaume's narrator does fall in love with the rose without possessing this rose permanently. On the other hand, scholars have claimed that Guillaume does not fulfill the pattern of a narcissistic self-interested lover: he does not reject another love, and therefore neither loves himself nor dies of unfulfilled narcissism.[169] Both contradictory readings are legitimate, and the inscription opens up the debate of how to understand the relation between the myth of Narcissus and Guillaume's text. Can the antique myth be interpreted like a moral tale of the Middle Ages? Is not

Guillaume's narrator who recognises himself when he reads the inscription as someone who might die of unfulfilled love exactly the opposite of Ovid's Narcissus who does not recognise himself when he sees his own reflection on the surface of the water? Thus, the inscription on the stone at the fountain opens the door to the broad field of intertextuality and so establishes a reference that is neither true nor false with regard to the diegetic world, but rather situates the text as a whole in the field of ambiguity. Thereby the inscription completes the major rhetoric element of Guillaume's text, the allegory: "La démarche allégorique est fondée sur la reprise d'éléments préexistants, familiers sinon consacrés, qui sont recomposés selon un projet nouveau, et trouvent ainsi une nouvelle profondeur de champ, la *senefiance*".[170]

Furthermore, the name of Narcissus not only refers to another text but also to the idea of self-reflection in a mirror in general. In the scene composed by Guillaume, this mirror for self-reflection is at the same time the concrete surface of the water *and* the story of Narcissus, present through the inscription as well as through the narration of the classical myth within the medieval romance. It thus seems legitimate to raise the question to what extent the *Roman de la Rose* functions as a speculum for its readers.[171]

For our purpose, the inscription on the stone of the fountain adds a significant quality to our understanding of the ways inscription can function in medieval narrative: the inscription establishes various links within the story itself and communicates an extra-diegetic reflection on writing as a medium to tell the truth or to spread a lie; but in Guillaume's text, the text-bearing stone is also part of a reflection on how texts function within the world of other texts, where meaning always depends on a larger context. In the *Roman de la Rose*, the inscription is already part of a semiotic system of signs with its own rules and laws.

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Elisa De Roberto

Fig. 1: Capital letter M.

Fig. 2: Shape of a Lily.

Fig. 3: Eagle.

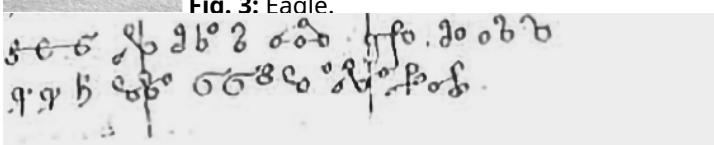

Fig. 4: Cryptic symbols to be inscribed following a magical instruction taken from Gal/Boudet/Moulinier Broggi 2017, 248 (= French National Library, MS Italian 1524).

Inscriptions in Italian Literature

1Introduction

Developing classic and Old Testament motifs, Italian literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries recovers and reinforces the profound symbolism linked to the book as object. It can be a treasure trove of science and knowledge, a monument capable of opposing the flow of time and mortal things, a mirror of human interiority (as we see in Dante's *Vita nova* or Petrarch's *Familiares*), and even an allegory of the universe (*Paradiso*, XXXIII, 85–88).[172] However, we must not forget that other types of writing frequently played important roles in medieval life. Italian scholars have for a long time (and often using interdisciplinary perspectives) turned their attention to the *scritture esposte*,[173] what Dante refers to as *visibile parlare* ("speaking visibly") in the *Commedia*,[174] which is to say texts written on "public" surfaces not intended primarily to accommodate writing. Scholars have considered epigraphs, inscriptions and graffiti on walls, tablets or memorial plaques for their historical, artistic and literary value,

but also as important sources for the study of ancient Italo-Romance varieties.[175]

Two Roman *scritture esposte*—the inscription of the catacomb of Commodilla (first half of the ninth century) and the inscription accompanying the fresco of the underground basilica of St Clement (end of the eleventh century)—represent some of the earliest examples of writing in an Italian vernacular.[176] Furthermore, the *scritture esposte* reveal different sociolinguistic levels. Spontaneous graffiti (i. e. not official inscriptions but those affixed at the initiative of an individual), such as the cases studied by Luisa Miglio and Corrado Tedeschi,[177] feature diaphasic and diastratically low levels of expression, for instance. In this sense, the interest in medieval *scritture esposte* is not only an attempt to conceptualise the framework of vernacular writing in a more complex and dynamic way. It is also influenced by recent studies in the history of the Italian language that focus on "hidden Italian",[178] a variety of non-literary Italian with a rather unstable physiognomy, diffused among people of different social strata, and able to serve many communicative functions. This attention to "speaking visibly" has allowed us to trace writers other than those traditionally considered the guardians of writing (the literati, notaries and merchants) who also played a fundamental role in the constitution of a vernacular culture.

The *scritture esposte* do not exhaust the scope of medieval inscriptions. Dissenting from Favreau's view of epigraphy as a long-lasting form of communication aimed at a wide audience,[179] Livio Petrucci drew attention to types of writings not meant to be preserved for the long term and lacking a communicative intent. These are written on materials less durable than stone or marble, such as cloth, gold or organic materials (wood, leaves, bones, meat, etc.), vulnerable to the ravages of time. Inscriptions can also be found in hidden places, engraved on the insides of bells, preserved inside tombs, and engraved on amulets not easily accessible to human sight. Such inscriptions, of which there are often only casual or indirect testimonies, constitute the identity of the object and show that writing is not always made to be read.[180] Precisely these testimonies of "ephemeral" writings[181] and those inaccessible to the gaze of others allow us to recover an often forgotten dimension of writing, one related to the pictographic origin and symbolic meaning of script.

In the Italo-Romance corpus of texts, the label of "narrated inscription" can be applied to *scritture esposte* (engraved or frescoed) on stone artefacts, to objects described in fictional works, chronicles or other types of texts, and even to a whole

series of writings of a private character, whose functions range from formulas for possession to thaumaturgical formulas, incantations or particular types of anagrams or symbols. In these cases, writing acts on reality through the manipulation of symbols, establishing a link between written symbols and concrete action. These are inscriptions in which the material enhances the effectiveness of the word: the *verbum* seems to draw body and substance from the surface on which it is fixed through writing, contributing to the performative function of the text-bearing artefact.[182] Sacred and magical inscriptions are mentioned in imaginative literature, but also in the hagiographic and religious corpus and in pragmatic texts designed to transmit a particular body of knowledge (such as recipe collections or books of secrets).[183]

The following classification proposes a first distinction between official versus private inscriptions, where + indicates that the feature (visibility, officiality, the intention to endure) is (or may be) present, and the—indicates that the feature is not (or is not necessarily) present.

Tab. 1: Inscription Classification.

Type of inscription	Visibility	Officiality	Intention to endure
Captions of figurative texts	+/–	+	+
Dedicatory and commemorative inscriptions	+/–	+	+
Admonitions	+	+	+
Statutes	+	+	+
Personal graffiti	+	–	+
Formulas of *possessio*	+/–	–	+
Incantations	–	–	–

This table is inspired by Francesco Sabatini's much more complex classification of vernacular inscriptions in medieval Italy.[184]

The classification shown in the table is conceived primarily for real inscriptions that exist outside of the texts as material and historical objects. To analyse and properly study narrated inscriptions it is also useful to consider discursive traditions in order to recognise the specific functions of narrated inscriptions in texts.[185] In the Italian Middle Ages, four major categories of discourses are relevant to the study of the narrated inscriptions: (1) imaginative literature (narrative and lyrical); (2) historical and travel literature chronicles, *itineraria*, etc.); (3) hagiographic and religious literature; (4) magical instructions (pragmatic texts).

The following analysis of narrated inscriptions in Italo-Romance will proceed by separating these discursive traditions, despite the numerous crossings and contaminations that may exist between one discursive universe and another. Nevertheless, this categorisation makes it possible to identify the textual traits and functions that unite the narrated inscriptions belonging to the same tradition, and to establish the role they play in shaping the text that harbours them. This chapter is concerned with texts written in any Italo-Romance variety, with particular attention to Tuscan, from the first literary attestations in the twelfth century until the end of the fourteenth century (including the work of Franco Sacchetti, who died in 1400).[186] During this period, the Italian linguistic landscape is profoundly multilingual, with no vernacular more prestigious than the others. Only during early modern Humanism did the Tuscan language gradually became established, which led to the standardisation of the written language.

In the following sections I will cover narrated inscriptions according to the discursive genre in which they feature because very often certain types of inscriptions tend to concentrate in particular genres. Historiographic texts and travel literature, genres that claim authenticity, will raise questions about the historic existence of the narrated inscriptions. From a general point of view, narrated inscriptions are always both true and always false. They are always true, because their phrasing is inspired by linguistic acts that contemporaries must have felt to be likely: for example, a tomb epigraph is situated in the context of a recognisable tradition and genre, regardless of whether the precise inscription is a historical artefact or not. Even behind clearly fantastic or miraculous inscriptions, it is possible to trace the echo of ritual behaviour and historically determined gestures. On the other hand, narrated inscriptions are always false, because when mentioned in a text different from the original context for which the inscription was conceived, its functions and purposes change. Furthermore, the concept of historical reality is not suited to some genres, such as hagiographic and miracle literature, which tends rather to represent the intervention of the divine in the order of reality, or magical recipe books, which aim at the manipulation of reality. Clearly, in these cases what interests us is to reconstruct practices and knowledge produced through narration.

2Literary Texts

It has often been suggested that the birth of Italian literature is delayed compared to other Romance languages; this delay concerns in particular the formation of prose narration, which for a long time, at least until the *Decameron* (1349–1353), is almost exclusively dominated by vernacularisations from the Latin and translations (and rewritings) of texts from beyond the Alps. In contrast, literature in verse emerges earlier. Beginning with the Sicilian tradition, Italian poetry has since its beginnings been strongly linked with troubadour poetry, from which it takes up and re-elaborates themes and styles.

We therefore begin our examination of the inscriptions narrated in the vernacularisations to highlight how these textual entities result from the interaction of different traditions (mostly Latin and Christian). The translations of prose romances of Breton material or of classical material in various vernaculars (Tuscan and Venetian above all) reformulate themes, images and motifs typical of romances in the *langue d'oil*. The stories of the deeds of noble knights give rise to frequent references to sumptuous funeral monuments and tomb epitaphs, some of which are very elaborate. This is the case in the *Palamedés pisano*, which features a nexus of tombs where each plaque shows the name of a knight and his statue:

> *Oro v'avea assai senssa fallo e argento, ma altre ricchesse non avea indelle tombe, se nno che in ciascuna avea intagliato un cavalieri e 'l suo nome. L'una dicea:—Qui giace Laimors, figliuolo di Febus, lo non pari di tutti li cavalieri.—E indell'autra tomba era scritto:—Qui giace Matas, figliuolo di Febus, lo non pari di tutti li cavalieri.—E indell'autra tomba era scritto:—Qui giace Siraoc figliuolo di Febus, lo non pari di tutti li cavalieri.—E indell'autra tomba era scritto:—Qui giace Altan lo bello, lo forte, che fu figliuolo di Febus, lo non pari di tutti li cavalieri* (II, X, 53)[187]
>
> There was gold and silver, but no other wealth, except that in each tomb was carved the silhouette of a knight and his name. One said:—Here lies Laimors, son of Febus, unrivalled among all knights'. The other said:—Here lies Matas, son of Febus, unrivalled among all knights:—The other said:—Here lies Sirac, son of Febus, unrivalled among all knights. The other said:—Here lies the beautiful Altan, son of Febus, unrivalled among all knights.

Each epitaph that one of the main characters, Breus, comes across bears the typical inscriptional formula: "Spatial deictic + stative verb + anthroponym + epithets". The sequence of epithets may relate to both physical and moral qualities of the knight, as well as to his descendants. In the example above, the recurrence of the expression "*the* unrivalled + partitive" is also striking. As we can see, the epitaphs can easily be translated literally due to the formulaic character of these texts, which dates back to Latin

funeral epigraphy.

Similar formulaic expressions can also be found on the tombs of lovers described in *Tristan riccardiano*, a loose translation of the *Tristan en prose* (1280–1300): it is the sepulchre that Marco has built in memory of Tristan and Isolde. In this case the inscriptions accompany life-size metal statues of the two lovers. The precise description of the two statues also reveals the names of Tristan and Isolde carved into the plate of Tristan's sword and into the middle of the chest of the female figure:

> *Qui dice lo conto, che a piè di quella sipoltura fece fare lo re Marco due imagini, onde l'una era fatta in sembianza di cavaliere e l'altra di dama, e avievi lettere intagliate che dicieno: "Qui giace T. di Leonis, lo migliore cavaliere del mondo, e la reina Y., la più bella dama del mondo"*. […] *In mezzo della chiesa diritta mente era la sipoltura delli due amanti* […]*. Al piè della sipultura giaceva due imagine diritte, di metallo intagliate, e erano quelle due imagine ciascuna così grande come uno uomo. L'una delle imagine era fatta in sembianza di cavaliere, sì bello e sì ricca mente aoperata, ch'elli era aviso a quelli che la riguardavano, che lo cavaliere fusse in vita. E elli teneva la sua mano sinistra dinanzi suo petto tutta chiusa, altresì come s'elli tenesse afibbiato suo mantello; e lo braccio destro teneva teso inver le genti, e teneva in quella mana* [*la*] *spada tutta nuda, ciò era quella spada medesima con la quale l'Amoroldo fue ucciso, e alo piatto della spada avia scritte lettere, che dicieno: T. L'altra imagine ch'era fatta in sembianza di donna, avea lettere in mezzo del petto che dicieno: Y*. (Appendice, 402)[188]
>
> Here says the story that at the foot of that tomb that king Marco had made there were two images, one in the resemblance of a knight, the other of a lady. And there were letters engraved with gold that said: "Here lies Tristan of Leonis, the best knight in the world and queen Isotta, the most beautiful lady in the world." […] The tomb of the two lovers was in the middle of the church. At his feet lay two straight images, of metal, as big as a man. One was made in the shape of a knight and seemed alive. He held his left hand in front of his chest, as if he were holding his cloak; his right arm was outstretched and held an unsheathed sword (it was the sword with which he had killed Amoroldo). And on the sword were an inscription that said "T". The other image, which was in the shape of a woman, had letters in the middle of her chest saying "Y".

The same episode appears in the *Tavola ritonda*, which proceeds on to a unique rewriting, loading the sepulchre of the two lovers with other allusions. As demonstrated by Giulia Murgia, the translator-rewriter of the *Tavola ritonda* wanted to attribute to the monument of Tristan and Isotta the value of a reliquary:[189] King Marco in fact has the bodies of the two lovers embalmed, so that their memory becomes tangible through the conservation of the bodies. The monument is enriched with precious details: the statues are not of metal, but of gold; the figure of Isolde is adorned with a flower. Also the text of the inscriptions, reported

through indirect discourse, differs due to added chronological details, which impart a greater realism to the scene and activate Christological references (Tristano was born in 333 and, as is recalled in another passage of the novel, dies at 33 years):

> *E a piede erano lettere intagliate, le quali contavano tutta loro vita: sì come egli erano istati morti nel CCCLXVIII anni; e sì come Tristano era nato nel CCCXXXIII anni, e la bella Isotta era nata nel CCCXXXVII anni.* (CXXX, 506f.)
>
> And at the feet were carved letters, which told their whole lives: how they had been killed in 368; and how Tristan was born in 333, and the beautiful Isolde was born in 337.

The epitaph takes on the features of a biography, and indeed, considering the miracle that is told later (from the hearts of the two bodies a vine is born),[190] seems to be a hagiographic narration (but see § 5).

A sacralisation of the sepulchre, according to modalities reminiscent of the cult of relics, also occurs in the *Facts of Caesar*, a fourteenth-century reworking in the Tuscan vernacular of the *Faits des Romains*:

> *Poi fece lo popolo fare una piramide, cioè una gran colonna quadrata di pietra numidiena, sopra quattro leoncelli di metallo, d'altezza di venti passi, e lassù messe la polvere del corpo di Cesare, in una mela di metallo dorata. Le lettere de la detta dicono così: "Qui giace lo padre del paese di Roma". Longo tempo facevano gli uomini quine sacrifizio, e tutte le stranie genti; e qui giuravano li Romani di loro cose e di loro discordie: "per Cesare così; e per Cesare altresì".* (VII, 67, 302)
>
> Then the people made a pyramid that is a great quadratic column of Numidian stone, over four small metal lions twenty feet high, and put the dust of Caesar's body there, in a golden metal apple. The letters say: "Here lies the father of Rome". For many years sacrifices were made here, and the Romans swore here invoking Caesar.

The epitaph engraved on the golden apple that holds the ashes of Julius Caesar is composed of the usual sequence of "deictic + stative verb"; a periphrasis takes the place of the anthroponym, which elevates Caesar as the father of Rome. The epitaph contributes decisively to the sacralisation of the place, as well as of the figure of Caesar (whose name becomes a formula for an oath). The narration mixes historical reality and medieval reconstruction. In reality, the monument described is not the true altar of Caesar, still visible in the Roman Forum, but the Egyptian obelisk brought to Rome by Caligula in 37 CE to adorn the circus of Nero-Caligola in the Vatican (today this obelisk is in the centre of Piazza S. Pietro). In the Middle Ages, the legend spread throughout Europe that the globe at the top of the obelisk was

Caesar's cinerary urn, probably fuelled by the *Mirabilia urbis Romae*, thanks to which pilgrims and travellers could learn about Roman monuments.[191]

Sometimes an epitaph takes on considerable proportions. The following inscription narrated in the *Storia di Troia* (History of Troy) by Binduccio dello Scelto, a fourteenth-century vernacularisation of the southern redaction of the prose *Roman de Troie*, is the only element of the funeral monument on which attention is focussed:

> *De la beltà e de l'adornamento de la sepoltura non vi voglio fare longo contio, ché troppo sarebbe longha materia, ma egli avea sopra la sepoltura lectere intagliate in greco che dicevano così: "Qui giace Hector tutto intero, el quale Acchilles uccise non niente corpo a corpo, ché non fu mai nullo chavaliere né prima né poi verso cui elli non avesse suo corpo difeso: ch'egli era lo più forte e lo più ardito e lo più conbattente e lo più valente di tutti coloro che mai furo nati di madre. Di sua bontià e di sua cortesia e di suo valore non fu mai nullo né die essere. Elli uccise di sua mano molti re* […]. *E s'elli fusse vissuto due anni senza più, tutti suoi nemici erano venti e distrutti e morti e confusi; ma aventura no lo sofferse niente né no lo volse."* (343, 361)
>
> I do not want to talk about the beauty of the tomb because it would be too long, but above the burial there were letters engraved in Greek saying: "Here lies Hector, killed by Achilles. There was never any knight before or since against whom he had not defended his life: he was the strongest and the bravest of all mortal men. Equal to him for goodness and nobility there was never anyone. He killed many kings by his hand [follows a list of the kings killed by Hector]. And if he had lived for two more years, he would have killed all his enemies, but Fate did not want it.

The epitaph is a short biography of Ettore, which shows a long list of enemies killed, ending with the bitter reference to the inevitability of fortune.

Also common are inscriptions of "talking objects", that is informative texts engraved on objects that play a particularly prominent role in the narrative. The vernacularisations from the French provide various examples for such text-bearing artefacts as well, demonstrating how well established this narrative ploy was. In the *Inchiesta del san Gradale* (a vernacularisation of the *Queste del Saint Graal*), the Siege Perilous bears the prophetic inscription:

> *e sì vi videro suso lectere che novellamente pareano scritte, che dicieno: QUATTROCENTO LIIIJ ANNI APRESSO LA PASSIONE DI GESÙ CRISTO, ALLO DIE DELLA PENTICOSTA DI' QUESTO SEGGIO TROVA' LO SUO MAESTRO.* (I, 23, 96)
>
> There they saw letters which seemed to have been engraved recently and which said: "Four hundred and fifty-four years after the passion of Christ, on the day of Pentecost this seat will find its master'".

Subsequently the seat is covered with a drape by Lancelot, waiting for the prophecy to be fulfilled. A little further on we find another speaking object, the sword in the rock:

> *et in quello petrone si avea una spada molto bella per sembranti, e llo pome di quella spada si era di pietre pretiose intagliata a letere d'oro molto riccamente. E lli baroni riguardano le lectere che dicieno: NULLO UOMO NON MI MOVERÀ DI QUIE SE NON QUELLI A CUI IO DEBBO PENDERE A LATO. E QUELLI SERAE LO MIGLIORE CAVALIERI DEL MONDO*. (I, 39, 99)

> And in that rock there was a very beautiful sword, and the handle was of precious stones richly carved with golden letters. And the barons looked at the letters, which said: "No man will move me from here except he beside whom I must hang. And that will be the best knight in the world".[192]

In both cases the characters and the reader are confronted with an object that announces a proof that only a predestined one can deliver. Interestingly, the "magic" object reveals its potential directly, without the contribution of an intermediary. As we will see later, this is a typical aspect of some magical practices, but in literary texts the object that speaks through the inscription establishes a sort of mirroring between the reader and the character, in that they simultaneously acquire the information that the monument is designed to reveal.

A similar narrative technique is also crucial to the unveiling of inscriptional allegories. In the *Storia del san Gradale*, a very faithful rendition of Robert de Boron's *Histoire del Saint Graal*, King Evalac has a vision of a tree trunk from which three closely interwoven and inscribed trees are born:

> *Alora il trase i· re medesimo verso suo letto, sì prese due ceri che ardeano dinazi e gli porta dinazi a' tre albori per riguardare e conoscere di che maniera e' poteano esere. Ma ciò videro eglino bene ch'egl'erano tre, e che il mezano ch'avea la lada scorza nascea del primiero, e che il te*[r]*zo uscia de l'uno e de l'altro. E i· re isgarda in alti, sì vide in ciascuno letere iscritte, l'una d'oro e l'altra d'azuro, e diceano le lettere del primiero albore "Questi forma"; e quelle de sencondo diceano "Questi salva"; e le letere del terzo albore diceano "Questi purifica"*. (LXXXI, 3–5, 87)

> The king took two candles burning in front of him to look at the three trees and know what they were. There were three trees and the one in the middle that had the ugly bark was born from the first and the third came out from both the others. And the king looked up and saw letters inscribed in each, the one in gold and the other in blue. The letters of the first tree said "This forms"; and those of the second said "This saves"; and the letters of the third tree said "This purifies".

The plant "One and Triune" is obviously a symbol of the Trinity: in fact the three branches embody the Father (who forms), the Son (who saves) and the Holy Spirit (who purifies). The gold and

blue colours of the letters strengthen the Christian symbolism. These short sentences, carved in the tree bark, seem to belong to two distinct levels: they are indeed part of the story, but are at the same time explanations addressed to the reader, who thus takes on the sovereign's point of view.

Let us move now to consider narrated inscriptions in the original works of Italian literature. The genre of the tomb epitaph seems to be the most frequent type. In the *Filocolo* by Giovanni Boccaccio we find two statements that realise the narrative theme of the false death of the lover:

> *io non possa sanza te stare né giorno né notte* […], *ma contento che nella mia sepoltura si possa scrivere: "Qui giace Florio morto per amore di Biancifiore", mi ucciderò* […].
>
> *Nel qual tempio entrati, la reina mostrò a Florio la sepoltura nuova, e disse: "Qui giace la tua Biancifiore". La quale come Florio la vide, e le non vere lettere ebbe lette, incontanente perduto ogni sentimento, quivi tra le braccia della madre cadde, e in quelle semivivo per lungo spazio dimorò*. (III, 20, 282)
>
> I say to you that, since I cannot be without you day or night, I will be glad that on my tomb is written "Here lies Florio who died for love of Biancifiore" and I will kill myself […].
>
> Entering the temple, the queen will show Florio the new burial and say: "Here lies your Biancifiore". As soon as he had seen this and read the false inscription, Florio lost all his senses, fainted into the mother's arms and remained in this semi-dead state for a long time.

The two epitaphs that are cited at different points in the text are connected via prolepsis and reversal. Florio in fact imagines his own burial and the inscription that will accompany it: this event recalls the episode of the false death of Biancifiore by analogy and antithesis. The inscription on the tomb of Biancifiore is also the narrative ploy with which Boccaccio has Florio learn of the false death of his beloved.

The motif of the future epitaph or imagined epitaph recurs in other texts as well. If pronounced in the first person, the inscription assumes the features of a will with which the person states a last and incontestable truth:

io farei scrivere nella mia tomba	I would write in my tomb
una scritta che direbbe così:	an inscription that would say:
"Chi vuole amare, li convien tremare,	"Those who want to love, it is convenient to tremble,
bramare, chiamare, sì come 'l marinaio in	crave, call, like the sailor in the bitter sea
mare amaro	

e chi no.m crede, mi deggia mirare per maraviglia,
ché per amor son morto in amarore,
sì com'è morto Nadriano e Caedino;
però si guardi chi s'ha a guardare".
(324–330, 500)

and those who do not believe me
must look at me because I died for love in
bitterness,
as Nadriano and Caedino died,
but be careful who must be careful".

This epitaph from the *Mare amoroso* (an anonymous Tuscan poem in loose hendecasyllables, written c. 1270–1280) utters first a maxim, and then a warning. Nadriano and Caedino are the corrupted names of two characters of French literature (Andreius and Ghedin), both famous for their unhappy and unrequited love.

At another point in the text the narrator asks the beloved woman to imagine the inscription that would accompany her effigy painted in the heart of the poet (according to a topos typical of the troubadour, Sicilian and Stil Novo lyric, but see § 4 below):

Certo, se voi poteste una fiata
veder[*e*] *sì come il lupo cerviere,*
che vede oltra li monti chiaramente,
voi vedereste la vostra figura
dipinta e suggellata nel mio core,
e lettere dintorno che diriano in questa guisa:
"Più v'amo, dea, che non faccio Deo,
e son più vostro assai che non son meo".
(38–45, 488)

Certainly, if you could see
how the lynx sees
beyond the mountains,
you would see your figure painted
and sealed in my heart,
and letters around it:
"I love you goddess more than God
and I am more yours than I am
mine".

Ciociola speaks here of *un'iscrizione quasi numismatica*, because the letters surround the figure of the woman as on a coin.[193]

With regard to the cases discussed so far, Dante develops a highly original take on epigraphy in the *Commedia*, in which inscriptionality pervades both narrative and style. Various studies have been interested in the epigraphic component that runs through the work, dwelling on both the inscriptions that Dante depicts during his journey and on the epitaphs that punctuate the appeals and speeches of the souls that the poet encounters. While there are only two inscriptions—the epigraph on the door of Hell and the inscription on the tomb of Pope Anastasius—there are countless cases in which characters of the *Commedia* resort to formulas and typical epitaphic styles to detain the figure of Dante-*viator*.[194] This phenomenon is particularly widespread in vernacular poetry, where so-called epigraph texts abound. They are constructed through stylistic features and formulas typical of funerary writing, apostrophes to the collective Everyman and the

"direct, immediate transplant not only of Christian content, but also of a form that belongs to the system of Christian communication".[195]

The two physical inscriptions in the *Commedia* both use prosopopoeia: it is the stone itself that speaks. In the epitaph of Anastasius II, which launches the eleventh canto, set in the expanse of the cemetery of the city of Dis,[196] the tombstone reveals the identity of the deceased and declares that it guards the pope's body. According to Dante, Anastasius was induced by Fotino, deacon of Tessalonice, to follow the Monophysite heresy of Acacio, a legend that circulated widely during the Middle Ages and probably dates back to the *Liber pontificalis*:

venimmo sopra più crudele stipa;	we came upon a still more cruel pack;
e quivi, per l'orribile soperchio	and there, by reason of the horrible
del puzzo che 'l profondo abisso gitta,	excess of stench the deep abyss exhales,
ci raccostammo, in dietro, ad un coperchio	for shelter we withdrew behind the lid
d'un grand' avello, ov' io vidi una scritta	of a large tomb, whereon I saw a scroll
che dicea: "Anastasio papa guardo,	which said: "Pope Anastasius I contain,
lo qual trasse Fotin de la via dritta".	whom out of the right way Photinus drew".
(XI, 3–9)	

Dante does not give us any further information about the life or personality of Anastasius, who does not even appear in the text, but is simply evoked by his tomb. Scholars have hypothesised that, recalling the figure of a heretical pope, Dante wanted to emphasise how even a religious could be guilty of the sin of heresy.[197]

The inscription that Dante reads at the gate of hell is also in the first person and differs from the standard epitaph by combining biblical allusions (the inferior door cited by Matthew 7:13), classical (Virgilian) ones (in particular, *Aen*. VI, 126–129),[198] but also references to daily life. As Battaglia Ricci points out, the text echoes the typical pattern of the admonitory inscriptions, mostly written in Latin, which stood on the open gates of the medieval city walls.[199] Similar texts, but with the opposite content, were also placed on the doors of the churches, which instead invited the faithful to enter the sacred place. Dante's inscription at the entrance to hell features a threefold anaphora at the beginning of the verses *(per me si va tra)*, a figura etymologica *(dolente, dolore)*, stark semantic contrast between the first and second triplet, a polyptoton *(etterne, etterno)*, and a final

warning:

“Per me si va ne la città dolente,	“Through me one goes into the town of woe,
per me si va ne l’etterno dolore,	through me one goes into eternal pain,
per me si va tra la perduta gente.	through me among the people that are lost.
Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore:	Justice inspired my high exalted Maker;
fecemi la divina podestate, *la somma sapienza e ’l primo amore.*	I was created by the Might divine, the highest Wisdom and the primal Love.
Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create	Before me there was naught created, save
se non etterne, e io etterno duro. *Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’intrate”.* (III, 1–9)	eternal things, and I eternal last; all hope abandon, ye that enter here!”

As Battaglia Ricci highlights, the triplet following the inscription deserves some attention:[200]

Queste parole di colore oscuro *vid’io scritte al sommo di una porta;* *perch’io: “Maestro, il senso lor m’è duro”* (III, 10–12)	These words of gloomy color I beheld inscribed upon the summit of a gate; whence I: “Their meaning, Teacher, troubles me”.

Here Dante enunciates his perplexity in the face of the *scrittura esposta*, which is defined as of “dark color”: according to scholars, the chromatic detail refers to the “material” color of the letters (painted with a dark ink) or, in a figurative sense, to the ominous content of the inscription (according to a symbolic system also used by Bonvesin da la Riva in the *Tre Scritture*).[201] Another singular element is the contextual improbability of the inscription: in reality this type of inscription had to be in Latin; Dante instead decided to use the vernacular here, while employing Latin in other places in the *Commedia*, for example to represent the song of the angels. This aspect should not be underestimated because the inscription as we have seen recalls eternity (*io etterno duro*). Perhaps the choice of the vernacular is for stylistic reasons, clarity and effectiveness of communication, or perhaps Dante reports a practice that was establishing itself in his time, but the inscription of hell also contains literary allusions. It might not be a coincidence that inscriptions in the vernacular appear in the *Tesoretto* of Brunetto Latini on the doors of the palaces of virtues: “In a great stone finely written: ‘Here dwells Fortitude’” (*in un gran petrone* / *scritto per*

sottigliezza / *"Qui dimora Fortezza* […]", XIV, 1296–1299).

An inscription *sui generis* appears in the XVIII Canto of *Paradiso*, one in which the souls of the sky of Jupiter are arranged in flight so as to compose the separate vowels and consonants that make up the Latin quotation *Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram*, the first verse of the book of Wisdom:

Mostrarsi dunque in cinque volte sette	They then displayed themselves in consonants
vocali e consonanti; e io notai	and vowels five times seven; and as their parts
le parti sì, come mi parver dette.	seemed to be said to me, I noted them.
"DILIGITE IUSTITIAM", primai	*Diligite Justitiam* were first verb
fur verbo e nome di tutto 'l dipinto;	and noun of all that was depicted there;
"QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM", fur sezzai.	*Qui Judicatis Terram* were the last.
Poscia ne l'emme del vocabol quinto	Then in the fifth word's M they so remained
rimasero ordinate; sì che Giove	arranged, that Jupiter seemed silver there
pareva argento lì d'oro distinto	pricked out with gold.
(XVIII, 88–96)	

The bodies of the blessed become an alphabet, creating a mobile and evanescent text whose last trace—the M—is transformed in turn into the symbol of the imperial eagle (M is in fact the initial of the word *monarchy*):

resurger parver quindi più di mille	more than a thousand lights appeared to rise,
luci e salir, qual assai e qual poco,	and upward move, some much, and some a little,
sì come'l sol che l'accende sortille;	even as the Sun, which setteth them on fire,
e quïetata ciascuna in suo loco,	allotted them; and when they quiet were,
la testa e'l collo d'un aguglia vidi	each in its place, an Eagle's head and neck
rappresentare a quel distinto foco.	I saw portrayed by that outstanding fire.
[…]	[…]
L'altra bëatitudo, che contenta	The other blest ones, who at first appeared
pareva prima d'ingigliarsi a l'emme,	content to form a Lily on the M,
con poco moto seguitò la'prenta.	went slowly on to shape the Eagle's form.
(XVIII, 103–108)	

The metamorphosis of the letter M into an eagle confirms the existence in these triplets of a very pronounced calligraphic

component. This detail can only be understood if one has in mind the form of M in Gothic epigraphical handwriting. The transition takes place, therefore, in the following stages:[202]

Even the intermediate figure of the lily is not accidental. According to some commentators, with the *m* adorned with lilies Dante wanted to allude to the house of France and its invasive policy; according to others the lily refers to the empire of Charlemagne; still others see in the lily a visual metaphor, similar to that of the white empyrean rose.[203] Exactly which tradition, reason or cue inspired Dante is unclear. However, we can note two aspects. First, the word formed by the blessed can be defined as epiphanic writing (see note 12 and the § 4) whose letters are apparitions, clearly emanations of the deity. In addition, Dante depicts an anthropomorphic, phytomorphic and zoomorphic alphabet, a calligraphic practice of which there are many examples in various medieval Western civilizations (and whose meaning is still far from clear).

The letter M is still at the centre of an alphabetic, visual game in the XXIII canto of *Purgatorio* (31–33). In the sixth frame, Dante meets the greedy, whose faces appear horribly skeletal, so as to make the letter M easily readable. Dante refers here to the widespread medieval opinion that man carried on his face the word *omo* (i. e. man): the two *o* would be represented by the eyes, while the *m* would be formed by the cheekbones and the eyebrows.

Dante's epigraphic model influenced other authors. I will not dwell on the very interesting theme of the iconographic rendering of Dante's inscriptions in medieval codices and works of art,[204] but will limit myself to Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione* (1342– 1343). Between the end of the second and the beginning of the third canto of the allegorical poem, the poet and his female guide arrive at the gates of a noble castle. The first door, a narrow one, is topped by an inscription announcing a rugged climb, which is also "the way of life"; the second large, bright door, in contrast, bears an inscription in golden letters that promises earthly fame and glory, as well as the joys of love:

E s'tu non credi forse che a salute	And if you don't believe that this narrow path
questa via stretta meni, alza la testa:	leads to salvation, raise your head.
ve' che dicon le lettere scolpute –.	See what the carved letters say:
Alzai allora il viso, e vidi: "Questa	Then I lifted up my face, and saw: "This
piccola porta mena a via di vita;	small door leads to the way of life;
posto che paia nel salir molesta,	even if it seems hard to climb

riposo etterno dà cotal salita;	this climb gives eternal rest;
dunque salite su sanza esser lenti,	so go up without being slow,
l'animo vinca la carne impigrita".	the soul overcomes the lazy flesh".
[…]	[…]
"[…] *Pon l'intelletto alla scritta ch'è posta*	"[…] Put your intellect to the inscription that is
sopra l'alto arco della porta, e vedi	placed above the high arch of the door, and see
come 'l suo dar val poco e molto costa".	how its giving is worth little and costs a lot".
Ed io allora a riguardar mi diedi	And I then looked at
la scritta in alto che pareva d'oro,	the inscription above that seemed golden,
tenendo ancora in là voltati i piedi.	keeping my feet turned away.
"Ricchezze, dignità, ogni tesoro,	"Wealth, dignity, every treasure,
gloria mondana copiosamente	worldly glory
do a color che passan nel mio coro.	I give to those who pass through my choir.
Lieti li fo nel mondo, e similmente	I make them happy in the world, and similarly
do quella gioia che Amor promette	I give that joy that Love promises
a' cor che senton suo dardo pugnente".	to the hearts that feel his sharp arrow".

(III, 10–21, 19)

Both inscriptions, which are an example of the ekphrastical tension that runs through the *Amorosa visione*, reverse Dante's model,[205] but also incorporate a gospel message (Matthew 7:13–14), variously reformulated in the Middle Ages in judgments and proverbs.[206]

At the conclusion of the discussion of inscriptions in literary texts we must note that we have not considered all the works, especially in verse, that were made to supplement frescoes or pictorial cycles. Thanks to the studies of Claudio Ciociola, Lucia Battaglia Ricci and Furio Brugnolo, who speaks of a poetry for painting, we know that many poets worked as authors of pictorial captions.[207] This is the case for Franco Sacchetti, who in the autograph book of rhymes (Florence, Laurentian Library, Ashburnham 574) recorded his epigraphic production by putting *titoletti* in the margins in order to combine the text with the image for which it was written.[208] Giovanni Boccaccio (author of the epitaph for Pino and Ciampi della Tosa) and Francesco Petrarca (author of the epitaph for the grandson of Francesco da Brossano) also transmitted their inscriptions in this fashion. This phenomenon goes beyond the issue of narrated inscriptions and demonstrates the mutual relations and influences between literary text, images and epigraphic practice.

3Historiography and Travel Narrative

A recent study by Paolo D'Achille highlights the many points of convergence between chronicles and *scritture esposte*, evident not only in the shared desire to commemorate, but also in common stylistic features such as spatial and temporal deictics, certain types of constructions (sub-clauses introduced by *when* and *how*), and the use of bilingualism.[209] Besides recalling cases of inscription-chronicles (real inscriptions containing chronicle information), D'Achille pays special attention to *scritture esposte* in the vernacular chronicles.

From the thirteenth century onwards, a new type of urban chronicle developed in Italy that abandoned the annalistic approach of earlier compilations in favour of pursuing an argument. In this new production the space of the city and its description becomes more important and the inscriptions become objects to remember, as "fossilized voices" that recall the memory of past things. Some of these medieval chronicles enter the literary canon, such as the *Cronica delle cose occorrenti ai tempi suoi* by Dino Compagni (c. 1310), a chronicle with a universal setting by Giovanni Villani (and the continuation by Matteo and Filippo Villani), and the *Cronica* of an anonymous Roman (1357–1360).[210]

This *Cronica*, which tells the story of the Roman Republic from 1325 to 1357, records some inscriptions that otherwise would never have come down to us. In chapter XVIII the anonymous author describes the allegorical paintings commissioned by the Roman tribune Cola di Rienzo in the Capitol building. This cycle of frescoes depicted the miserable state besetting Rome.[211] The city is personified as a widow on a boat adrift in a stormy sea agitated by the breath of animals symbolising the different orders of the Roman population; Italy, the Christian faith and the Virtues mourn the sad fate of Rome. The Anonymous Roman also records the *tituli*, i. e. the captions that accompanied and reveal the allegorical correspondences:

"Questa ène Roma".	"That's Rome".
"Queste citati per la iniustizia pericolaro e vennero meno".	"These cities for injustice were destroyed".
"Sopra onne signoria fosti in aitura.	"Above every lordship you were at height, now
Ora aspettamo qui la toa rottura".	we wait here for your destruction".
"Questa ène Italia".	"This is Italy".
[…]	[…]
"D'onne virtute fosti accompagnata.	"You had many virtues.

Ora per mare vai abannonata”.	Now you are alone and abandoned at sea”.
“O summo patre, duca e signor mio,	“O great Father,
se Roma pere, dove starraio io?”.	if Rome dies, what will I do?”
“Questi so’ li potienti baroni, […]”.	“These are the mighty lords, […]”.
(XVIII, 145–147)	

The chronicler also recalls the fresco in Sant’Angelo in Pescheria, again commissioned by Cola, which instead depicts the salvation of Rome, of course embodied by the tribune itself. In fact, Cola di Rienzo is portrayed as an angel, invoked by the patrons to liberate Rome. Again, the Anonymous Roman relays the captions in full:

“Agnilo, agnilo, succurri alla albergatrice	“Angel, Angel, help our city”.
nostra”.	
“Veo lo tiempo della granne iustizia e là	“I see the time of great justice and you keep
taci fi’ allo tiempo”.	quiet until that time”.
(XVIII, 151)	

The testimony of the Anonymous Roman is important for many reasons. First, it allows us to reconstruct the content and significance of the frescoes and trace the modes of political propaganda. It also documents the technical terminology used in medieval times to refer to the *scritture esposte*. Thus, we find *tituli*, *letters* and *vierzo* (“verses”) used as terms for captions. But beyond its historical value, the description offered by the Anonymous Roman also plays a role in the plot: through the inscriptions the Anonymous Roman not only recalls an important object for the city’s memory, but enhances Cola’s political capacity and the effectiveness of his political communication.

Inscriptions in chronicles are not always written in the vernacular. Villani, a Tuscan chronicler, for example, describes an inscription in Latin:

Si probitas, sensus, virtutum gratia, census,	If honesty, intelligence, the highest virtues,
	wisdom, good reputation
Nobilitas orti possint resistere morti,	and the nobility of blood could resist death,
Non foret extintus Federicus qui iacet intus	Federico, who rests here, would not have died.
(VII, 41, 332)	

The memory of the inscription is linked to the urban environment. Villani, describing the construction of the Baptistery S. Giovanni in Florence, also recalls the astronomical

inscription in medieval Latin that appears under the sun mosaic (or "story *a moises*", as Villani calls it on the basis of a folk etymology). Probably the writing was so popular with the locals that Villani felt the need to clarify its origin and function:

> *e a' nostri tempi si compié il lavorio delle storie a moises dipinte dentro. E troviamo per antiche ricordanze che la figura del sole intagliata nello ismalto, che dice: "En giro torte sol ciclos, et rotor igne", fu fatta per astronomia.* (II, 23, 90)
>
> and in our day the work of the mosaics was finished. And we find in ancient recollections that the figure of the sun carved in the enamel, which says: *En giro torte sol ciclos, et rotor igne*, it was made for astronomy.

The inscription (called the *rotor*) is still visible today: it is a palindromic phrase stating "[I], the sun, with fire make turn the circles and I turn as well". Villani explains the meridian function of the mosaic, which in its day was probably lost when the work was moved from its original place and ceased to function as an astronomical clock.

Chronicles in the vernacular also record simpler inscriptions of a lower register, such as defamatory paintings, of which statutes also speak. The *Cronaca todina* by Ioan Fabrizio Degli Atti states how

> *lo decto meser Ricardo fo dipencto im piaza et a le porte, per traditore, cum uno breve che diceva*:
> *"Io so Ricardo Spadatracta*:
> *el tradimento ordinai et non venne facta"*.
> (108)
>
> Ricardo was painted in the square and on the doors as a traitor with a writing that said:
> "I am Ricardo Spadatracta:
> I ordered the betrayal and it was not done".

The practice of painting a picture of the condemned accompanied by a scroll or defamatory caption is also recorded in a Sienese chronicle published by Franco Suitner:[212]

> *"Voi che legete andate a questi brevi,*
> *legete el mio e fiavi manifesto,*
> *che per dare più molesto*
> *al mio comuno per più tradimento*
> *voltai la via del suo intendimento".*
> *"Voi che guardate queste dipenture*
> *mirate me, che per la mia avaritia*
> *tradii con gran niquizia*
> *la patria mia, per avere fiorini*
> *Siena vendei a' falsi Fiorentini"*
> *"Crudel rubaldo cavalier superbo,*
> *privato di mia schiatta e d'ogni onore,*
> *ingrato alla mia patria e traditore,*
>
> You who read, read this writing and know that to do more harm to my town, I overturned its decision.
>
> You who look at these paintings look at me, who have betrayed with great injustice my country for my avarice; to have money, I sold Siena to the malicious Florentines.
> Cruel and rebellious knight, deprived of my lineage and all honour, ungrateful to my country and traitor,

fra costor pendo iniquo ed acerbo”.	I stand among them.

In all examples, the figure expresses itself in the first person, using verses from a rather popular register, consisting of a hendecasyllable and two couplets metrically dissimilar. These inscriptions are about making visible short confessions expressed in the past tense, and sometimes concluded with the accused recognising that his sentence is just. In some cases, the exordium resembles the typical address to the traveller in funerary epitaphs.

Like historiography, the medieval travel literature claims authenticity as an eye witness account. In this type of text we find inscriptions whose function may be to identify a place, or to report on the customs and traditions of a particular people. The first function is important in the passage below, taken from the *Libro d’Oltramare* by Nicholas Poggibonsi (1346–1350), a sort of itinerary through the Holy Land, which cites two inscriptions. The first concerns the tabernacle of the chapel of Christ’s tomb in Jerusalem, to which a Latin inscription in gold letters is attached:

e in ciascuno canto del civorio si è uno verso, e è sì alto che apena si può leggere; e li versi dicono così:	And on each side of the ciborium is a verse, and it is so high that it is barely readable; and the verses say so:
[v]ita mori voluit et in hoc tumulo requievit	Life wished to die and lay in this tomb
Mors quia vita fuit nostram victrix abolevit.	because death was turned into life, conquering life has destroyed our death.
Nam qui confregit inferna sibique subiecit.	For he who broke in pieces the infernal regions and subjected them to Himself
Et redimendo suos cujus dux ipse choortis	by ransoming his people the Leader himself of the company
Adque triunfator bine surrexit leo foras	and Vanquisher arose from this place as a lion from its cage.
Tartarus inde gemit Mors lugens spoliatur.	Wherefore hell cries out and lamenting death is robbed.
(18, 60)	

The second inscription reported by Niccolò of Poggibonsi concerns the tomb of Elijah on Mount Carmel and the chapel erected on Mount Tabor in memory of the transfiguration of Christ. Both of these are commemorative inscriptions:

E ivi il nostro Signore Gesù Cristo, volendo mostrare la gloria sua agli apostoli, ivi dov’è la tomba, sì si trasfigurò e apparve subito Moisè e Elia, e parlavano con lui; e la voce fu udita da cielo, e così si è scritto di lettere d’oro

> *su nella detta tomba, e dicono così: "Hic est filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui, ipsum audite". Et in terra si sono le forme, come sbigotito santo Pietro, e santo Giovanni, e santo Iacobo caddono in terra, per lo grande splendore; e dove santo Pietro cadde, sì v'è scritto così: "Domine, bonum est nobis hic esse, etc". La chiesa si è quasi guasta, se non se la tomba*. (CXXV, 1345)
>
> And here our Lord Jesus Christ, wanting to show his glory to the apostles, was transfigured, and Moses and Elijah appeared immediately, and spoke with him; and the voice was heard from heaven, and so letters of gold were written in the tomb, and so they say: *Hic est filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui, ipsum audite*. And on the ground there are the forms of the bodies of St Peter, St John, and St James, who fell faint to the ground, for the great splendour; and where St Peter fell, it is written as follows: *Domine, bonum est nobis hic esse*, etc. The church almost broke down, except for the grave.

In the *Milione*, Marco Polo instead records the inscription on the tablets given by the Grand Khan to his subjects word for word:

> *E in tutte queste tavole è scritto uno comandamento, e dice così: "Per la forza del grande dio e de la grande grazia ch'à donata al nostro imperadore, lo nome del Grande Kane sia benedetto, e tutti quegli che no ubideranno siano morti e distrutti"*. (LXXX, 9, 122)
>
> A commandment is written in these tablets: "By the power of the great God and of the great grace which he has given to our emperor, may the name of the Great Khan be blessed, and that whoever shall not obey him be killed and destroyed".

The tablets and the command described by the Venetian are *paiza*, tablets of metal or wood that the Mongols carried hanging from their necks and that could also be used as passports. Marco Polo's attention to this object reveals his interest in the political and commercial system of Asian countries, an interest shared by his readers.

4The Religious and Hagiographic Discourse

Saints' lives are among one of the first genres written in the vernacular. Aimed at a broad and diverse audience, these texts transpose and spread topoi and motifs originating with the first Christian communities in the East. Hagiography also gives rise to different narrative genres (legends in prose and verse, sacred representations, translations, miracles, etc.)[213] and continuously influences secular literature. One of the most widely disseminated collections was the *Legenda aurea* (Golden Legend, 1298) by the Dominican Jacopo da Varazze (Latin: Voragine), soon translated into the vernacular in the fourteenth century.

Hagiographic literature was spread and multiplied by preachers, who drew on *exempla* and narrative ideas, but also circulated doctrinal and theological content.

In the lives of saints and in religious literature many types of inscriptions appear, some of which have already been examined in the preceding sections. Very present are of course epitaphs, which evoke mixed reactions. While one exemplum in the *Disciplina clericalis* praises the didactic function of the tomb inscriptions, Bernardino of Siena in one of his sermons (*Prediche volgari sul campo di Siena 1427*, X, 3) advises against the practice of affixing signs and inscriptions onto graves and tells of a man who replaces the *a* in *pace* in the phrase *Requiescat in pace* with an *e*, so that it reads *Requiescat in pece*, i. e. "may he rest in hell".

Beyond stone epitaphs, religious literature confronts us with inscriptions in a variety of other media: the sacred word is not only fixed on stone or metal, but manages to impress itself on very different materials. Moreover, even the Holy Scripture alludes to very different acts of writing: the commandments engraved on the tablets of the law, the divine hand writing a phrase on the wall of a palace, Jesus writing in the sand (John 8:6–8) before erasing the traces with his finger.[214]

I begin by cycling through epiphanic inscriptions, manifestations of the divine. An inscription on the heart of the saint or devotee is an important topos. As Polo de Beaulieu has shown, it originates from the legend of Ignatius of Antioch, becomes widespread in the Middle Ages thanks to the *Speculum historiale* (thirteenth century) by Vincent of Beauvais and the *Legenda aurea*, but also appears in the *Espositione del simbolo* (fourteenth century) by Domenico Cavalca.[215] As the early martyrologies record, Ignatius repeatedly uttered the name of Christ, so that after his death they found the name of Jesus written in his heart in golden letters.[216] With this precedent, the inscription on the heart becomes a symbol of holiness and gives rise to variations on the theme. In collections of exempla and miracles, the marvel is transposed onto simple devotees who demonstrated that they held the name of Jesus in high esteem. A sermon of 1425 by Bernardino of Siena refers to an inscription on the heart to a dead pilgrim on Calvary. This is interesting because it shows how precisely the topos of the inscription on the heart was instrumental in the Dominican discourse for the promotion of the cult of the name of Jesus and the trigram JHS. The material and the wording of the inscription also diversified.

In the *Legenda aurea* and its translation into the Italian vernacular, the chapter on the Annunciation tells the story of a

humble monk of feeble intelligence who did nothing but repeat "Ave Maria". After his death a lily grows on his grave, on whose leaves appears the inscription *Ave Maria* in letters of gold:

> *eccoti sopra l'avello suo crescere uno bello giglio e in catuna foglia avea scritto di lettere d'oro: "Ave Maria". Correndo tutti a sì grande fatto vedere, trassero la terra del sepolcro, e la radice del giglio trovarono che procedeva de la bocca del morto*. (L, 437)
>
> A beautiful lily grew up above his grave, and one leaf had the words "Ave Maria". All rushed to see, and found that the root of the lily was born from the mouth of the dead.

The same narrative nucleus reoccurs in the rhymes of Bonvesin da la Riva, a Milanese poet of the thirteenth century, both in the *Cinquanta miracoli* and in the *Libro del cavaliere*.[217]

It is likely that the inscription on the heart is the basis for secular motifs such as the topos of the face of the beloved engraved in the poet's heart (see § 2). In a poem by Matteo Frescobaldi, the ardour of Love incises "Francescha" into the heart of the poet:

Con tre saette Amor nel cor mi venne,	With three arrows with black rods Amor came
credendo sostenerlo non potesse,	into my heart believing I could not bear it,
coll'aste nere e poi scritto in esse	and in the arrows were
lettere d'oro che parien le penne.	golden letters that looked like pens.
La prima avea un'EFFE R A e ENNE,	The first had an EFFE R A and ENNE,
poi la seconda C E e ESSE,	then the second C E and ESSE,
la terza C H A parea ch'avesse,	the third C H A
secondo che lla mente ne ritenne.	as far as I can remember.
(9, 79)	

The body is a very frequent writing material in hagiographical literature, which also alludes to specific ritual gestures, like the sign of the cross that the faithful draw by hand on their foreheads, lips and heart, just before the reading of the Gospel. The forehead in particular is a part of the body that has a high symbolic value: a mark on the forehead is in fact the singular sign of belonging to God or to the devil. Such inscriptions often contain hidden allusions to liturgy, as we see in the seven *P*s the angel draws on Dante's forehead in the ninth canto of *Purgatorio*.[218]

Epiphanic writings in the hagiographic narratives also intervene at the time of the saint's martyrdom: a choir of angels descends to earth to convey a divine message inscribed on a scroll, a painting or a board. The inscription, which may be

quoted or reported less directly, certifies the sanctity of the martyr, as happens in two subsequent passages from the *Leggenda di s. Rocco* in ottave (fifteenth century) and one of the many legends in prose of Saint Agata, *La lienda de Sancta Agata virgine*:[219]

E a' soy pedi fo posto uno quadreto	And at his feet was placed a small plaque
de la gratia ch' elo aveva domandata,	of the grace he had asked for
e scripto 'li era tuto a letre d' oro	and there is written in gold letters
che confermato l' è nel suo coro.	that which is confirmed in his heart.
(124, 987–990)	

cento zuveni billissimi ornati e tuti vestiti de biancho, li quali may non erano veduti in quello payso, e vene dove era lo corpo de sancta Agata, e li poxe una tavorela de marmoro al capo, dove era scripto queste parole: "Mentem sanctam, spontaneam, honorem Deo et patrie liberationem". (107)

A hundred beautiful young people dressed in white and adorned came where the saint Agata was and placed a marble tablet on her head, where it was written: *Mentem sanctam, spontaneam, honorem Deo et patrie liberationem*.

The inscription of St Agata spreads from the first vitae of the saint and is an element already present in the Eastern tradition. Additionally, the source we have quoted subsequently adds a detail of daily life: *La lienda de Sancta Agata virgine* describes the custom, apparently common in fifteenth-century Milan, to distribute sandwiches (*michete*) inscribed with the phrase in question:

E queste sono le sancte parole che se scriveno sopra le michete che funo dato via per li canonici de Sancto Nazaro lo dì de sancta Agata, che hano vertù contra lo focho che faza dagno, in ulgare dice cossì: "Questa vergene ha hauto la mente sancta, e spontaneamente s' è offerta al martirio a honore de Dio e a liberatione de la patria". (109f.)

And these are the holy words that are written on the breads that the monks of San Nazzaro give in the street on the day of Santa Agata. These words are useful against fire. In the vernacular they mean: "This virgin had the holy mind, and spontaneously offered herself to martyrdom in honour of God and for the liberation of the country".

The reference is to *Agathe*-Brot, a widespread tradition especially in Northern Italy, Austria and Switzerland and linked to the cult of the saint, believed to be able to protect against fire and lightning. The inscription of "Agata" was also often engraved inside bells, which in the Middle Ages had the important task of serving as fire alarms. Such examples demonstrate how the inscriptions narrated in hagiographic literature carry out two

functions simultaneously: on the one hand they play a role in the story of the events involving the saint; on the other hand, they contribute to motivating and establishing the cult of the saint and give rise to ritual practices and long-standing customs.

5The Magical Discourse: Recipe Books

Many medieval writing practices, such as the ones I have just discussed, lie at the heart of an interconnected field between religion, superstition and medical discourses. The practice of carrying various types of inscriptions (on fabric, on metal or stone, or wrapped in a magic scroll) on the body is often condemned in didactic religious treatises. Nevertheless, these formulas, used across a Europe, were deemed capable of protecting one from various dangers. Not surprisingly, they tended to be in Latin, the language of Christian rites, which to the "illitterati" must have had an esoteric aura.

More precise information on this type of inscription comes from recipe books or books of secrets, mostly vernacular translations of the *Thesaurum pauperum* by Pietro Ispano (thirteenth century), but also from some collections of recipes handed down orally. In the Sicilian vernacular, for example, we find a long interpolated sequence that contains some thaumaturgical inscriptions:[220]

> *A febri terzana*
> *Pigla tri puma et scrivi cum incastro, innanczi ki li vengna la febri "+Jhs alga + Jhus galla +Jhuslaga amen". Et factu quistu, dandu a maniari omni iornu unu la mattina a lu infirmu et serrà guaritu.* (87, 64).
>
> Against tertian fever
> Take three feathers and write on them with ink, before the fever comes, "+Jhs alga + Jhus galla +Jhuslaga amen". And done this, every day in the morning give the feathers to eat to the sick and he will be cured.

This remedy for ague fever consists in taking three apples and inscribing their top with the cross, the trigram and the two words *alga* and *galla* in ink, perhaps corruptions of the magic word *agla* (from Hebrew). The passage is significant because it also bears witness to a graphophagical practice: the inscriptions are eaten along with the fruits (the same is true of *Agathe*-Brot).

Magical inscriptions may also be written on the patient's body:

> *A rristringiri lu sangu di lu nasu*
> *Scrivi cum lu dictu sangui in lu frunti, si illu è homu: "+beretonis oyberoniso"; si è fimmina: "+ britonissa oy bironissa".* (89, 65).

To stop the nose bleed
Write with that blood on the person's forehead, if he is a man: "+beretonis oyberoniso"; if she is a woman: "+ britonissa oy bironissa".

Magical "experiments" do not differ greatly from this. They sometimes involve writing short sentences, words or symbols. Typically, these inscriptions are to be drawn on paper, papyrus or the patient's skin; but there are cases where the material is more imaginative. Several spells in the book of magic in MS Italian 1524 (French National Library), for instance, require a tin or wax writing surface:[221]

Se voi havere alchuna femina [...] *formarai l'imagine di stagnio in nome di quella persona la qual tu desidri havere* [...] *Poi scrive in quella imagine queste parole in gramatica, cioè: omnis homo, et fagli anchora sopra i sigilli di Venere e dil Leone*. (37, 234)

If you want to have a woman [...] you will form the image of tin in the name of the person you wish to have [...] Then write these words in Latin in that image: *omnis homo*, and write again the symbols of Venus and Leo.

The same commandment is repeated twice, with the only difference being the zodiac signs involved:

Volendo haver alchuna femina, in l'hora di Giove, scrive con grafio di ferro il nome di quella amante e dilla sua matre in lammia di ferro, e le carattere di Venere e Sagitario e d'Ariete [...] *Poi scalda questa lammia spesse fiate al fuocho*. (41, 235)

if you want any woman, write with an iron tool her name and her mother's name on an iron or glass sheet. Write also the symbol of Venus, Sagittarius and Aries. [...] Then heat this foil up often by fire.

These artefacts recall the *tabulae defixionis* used in the Greco-Roman world. The principle is the same: the analogy between image/inscription and real referents makes what you write on wax or metal materialise in reality. Other experiments require the writing of symbols and unknown characters with oil. At the end the inscription must be deleted with the finger and the oil must be applied to the face:

Volendo andar avanti a qualche gran signore o prencipe, scrive tutto questo psalmo: Confiteor tibi, Domine in lammia di vitro o di ferro con le carratteri infrascritte, et poi guastale con olio rosato, et di quello olio la tua faccia unge, et serai ben receputo. (248)

If you want to go to some great lord or prince, write the entire psalm: *Confiteor tibi, Domine* in a sheet of glass or iron with the following symbols. Then destroy the inscription with oil of rose, grease your face with that oil and you will be received well.

In other cases, spells require different materials, bones, fruit, body parts; instead of ink or an incision, people may use blood. It is not always necessary to strictly follow the indications: in some cases a particular medium can be replaced by paper or parchment.

These practices, apart from being very widespread, also gave rise to various businesses by charlatans. The novella of the fourteenth century does not fail to take up this phenomenon and turns it into a mechanism of comedy. In one of the short stories from Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a magic scroll is the key feature of the narrative: the fool Calandrino falls in love with a woman and the charlatan Bruno makes him believe that he can bind her to him by crafting a magic scroll which will then lead to contact with the desired woman. To this end, Calandrino will have to procure a number of ingredients:

> *"Adunque, – disse Bruno – fa che tu mi rechi un poco di carta non nata e un vispistrello vivo e tre granella d'incenso e una candela benedetta, e lascia far me". Calandrino stette tutta la sera vegnente con suoi artifici per pigliare un vispistrello, e alla fine presolo, con l'altre cose il portò a Bruno. Il quale, tiratosi in una camera, scrisse in su quella carta certe sue frasche con alquante cateratte, e portogliele*. (IX, V, 47–48, 1422)

> "Fetch me, then", quoth Bruno, "a bit of the skin of an unborn lamb, a live bat, three grains of incense, and a blessed candle; and leave the rest to me". To catch the bat taxed all Calandrino's art and craft for the whole of the evening; but having at length taken him, he brought him with the other matters to Bruno: who, having withdrawn into a room by himself, wrote on the skin some cabalistic jargon, and handed it to him.

Obviously, the scroll is only a means to fool Calandrino. It is noteworthy that similar ingredients are also cited by Cecco d'Ascoli in the poem *L'Acerba*, which polemicises against witchcraft: *L'immagin dello stagno e della cira*, / *E vespertilio con scritta di sangue* / *Che con lo spago legato si tira* ("The image of the pond and the wax, / And bat with the inscription of blood / Which tied with string is pulled").

The topic of the magic scroll is taken up by Franco Sacchetti in his *Trecentonovelle*. An impostor sells a magic scroll for five guilders to a woman who is afraid of dying in childbirth. The magic scroll seemingly fulfils its effect and many other women decide to purchase it. After a few years the first woman and her friends are curious to know what is written on the inside and open it (to maintain their effectiveness magic scrolls needed to remain closed):

> *e trovata la scritta in carta sottilissima di cavretto, lessono il detto brieve, il cui tenore dicea cosí: "Gallina, gallinaccia, Un orciuolo di vino e una cofaccia,*

Per la mia gola caccia, S'ella il può fare, sí 'l faccia, E se non sí, si giaccia". (CCVII, 565)

And when they found the inscription in very thin paper of a kid, they read the letter, which said: "Hen, hen, a jug of wine and a cake, push it down my throat, if you can, do it, and if you don't, lie down".

Although this is an example of writing on parchment and not strictly speaking an inscription, its similarity to the magical practices in the *Decameron* offers a comical take on the reputed powers of text-bearing artefacts. The inscription parodies the typical trend of these protection formulas, replacing rare and solemn words with the vocabulary of the most trivial everyday language (*gallina*, *cofaccia* or "focaccia"). The rhyme also contains an obscene pun on which the humour of the entire story is based. The novel ends with the exhortation not to yield to easy credulity.

6Conclusions

Studying inscriptions in the context of discursive genres is important for many reasons. Some inscriptions are found especially in certain genres, where they can work as intertextual references and establish a literary topos, such as the lover's epitaph. Depending on the genre in which they appear, inscriptions seem to have different functions. While in the chronicles they are used as sources and therefore as evidence to substantiate the truthfulness of the reported facts, in fictional texts inscriptions can be informative elements that allow the narrative to progress: they can become a convenient way to introduce details or new information into the text. Often inscriptions are quotations that refer to a literary or biblical topos. The inscriptions in the *Commedia*, for example, build a dense network of intertextual references to Virgil's *Aeneid* and more generally to classical tradition. Some inscriptions, epiphanic ones, for instance, exist only within the discursive framework that legitimises them. This proves the importance of studying these textual objects.

The question of materiality deserves a final comment. Sometimes the material is not so important: in the *Thesaurum pauperum* or in the magical discourse materials are often interchangeable; in fact, a spell can be written either on iron or on glass. It would be interesting to understand which cases offer such a freedom of choice. In any case, regardless of function, genre, material or support, the narrated inscriptions in the Italian corpus show an affinity for those simple and short genres (motto,

epitaph, etc.) that exert a particular fascination in the literature of all times. Most of the cases discussed in the previous pages are epigraphic inscriptions: stone and marble are the materials most commonly represented in the narrated inscriptions. Certainly, in the Italian Middle Ages epigraphy had an important public and political function.[222] It is one of the main means by which the city authorities could communicate with the people. The prominence that epigraphs engraved in stone and marble enjoy in medieval texts may have other reasons. In fact, we must not forget the prestige of the Latin epigraphic tradition, nor underestimate the symbolic meaning linked to writing in stone, the epitome of the word that lasts over time and therefore the epitome of writing itself. In this sense, it is possible to see an analogy between the text engraved on stone and the monumental value of the literary text.

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Inscriptions on the Iberian Peninsula: Material Script and Narrative Logic in Castilian and Catalan Literatures

1Introduction: Iberian Literatures and Narrativity

This publication originated in the Collaborative Research Centre 933 "Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies" (subproject C09 "Inscription of the Body: Text and Body in Pre-modern Iberian Literature"). The CRC 933 is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

Before the unification of the Castilian and the Aragonés crowns under the "Catholic Kings" Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile in 1479, the medieval Iberian Peninsula was a heterogeneous mosaic of smaller kingdoms. This linguistic diversity has not changed significantly until today. The Iberian primary dialects *català*, *gallego*, old *castellano*, (*navarro-*)*aragonés* and *astur-leonés* (the latter three combining into Castilian) all developed from vernacular Latin. While Castilian[223] and Catalan[224] evolved into important juridical and administrative languages after political unification campaigns during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Gallego-Portuguese was prized as the language of poetry (*cantigas*) and was, as such, also used by Castilian writers.[225] Nevertheless, each of the three dominant *romances* (vernacular languages) developed a sophisticated literary register and rich textual corpora. If the bureaucratic structures set up for the rivalries between the royal houses and the campaigns against the Muslim domination were great motors for the rise of vernacular cultural expression, the influence of the Arabian cultural world and the rediscovery of classical Antiquity also boosted literary production. Each *romance* developed its own textual corpus, so that many texts circulated as parallel variants, permitting cultural and sometimes political differentiations. One striking example of this phenomenon are historiographic texts, where the resemantization of political facts indicates dynastic power plays.[226]

For this short and necessarily eclectic overview of inscribed objects in medieval narrative, I will focus on the literary productions in Castilian and Catalan. While Gallego-Portuguese texts also offer interesting inscriptions, I leave them aside for the sake of coherence. My understanding of "narrative" is rather broad, due to challenges of distinguishing between pre-modern literary genres and an uncertain notion of "literature" altogether.[227] In the Iberian context, not only literary prose like the Arthurian romances, but also historiographical texts, and even philosophical or theological treatises, contain narrative elements and recall the structure of successive adventures. Finally, although the notion of narrativity is of course not limited to prose, I will also exclude verse compositions, smaller poetry forms and theatre here.

Narrated inscriptions have not been a separate focus in previous scholarship on Iberian literatures. While occasional instances of non-standard material writing in different literary genres and time periods have been covered, a genre- and language-crossing approach is still lacking.[228] The appearance of text-bearing clothing in the Castilian courtly and chivalric novel since the fifteenth century, for example, has been related to historical tournament practices, but has not been linked to fictional representations of inscribed bodies in mystic or magical contexts. Likewise, it is both interesting and necessary to examine historical practices of reading and text-production in relation to the presence of writing in fictional contexts in order to clarify the scope of the phenomena of inscriptions, writing and hermeneutics. In relation to the presence of prior non-human (magic, divine) writing within the fictional world, the problematic of a fictional modelling of the marvellous or a specific pre-modern phantastic is also of interest. This article aims to juxtapose some of those different facets of narrated inscriptions, showing some leads for further comparative readings.

A quantitative approach to narrated inscriptions shows a clear rise in the phenomenon in the fifteenth century.[229] This might be due to the increasing relevance and everyday presence of writing, but could also result from the growing importance of allegory and emblematics as visual representations of abstract meaning. The reduction of complex genealogical, relational or individual attributions to pictograms or short textual mottos in the historical world (for example, in the tournament practices at the time) provided models for similar inscriptions in fictional worlds. Vice versa, the impact of fictional models for the representation of power also influenced "real-life" strategies. Finally, the rise of

narrated inscriptions in the Iberian corpus during the fifteenth century is also related to the increasing influence of foreign literatures and cultures in this period. For example, most of the recorded Iberian adaptions of Arthurian texts only date back to the fifteenth century. Unlike earlier indigenous Hispanic epic texts and chronicles, the fifteenth-century *Crónicas particulares* and especially the chivalric romance (*novella caballeresca* / *libro de caballerías*) and the courtly sentimental romance (*novela sentimental*) prominently feature textuality, as letters, forms of diegetic *mise en abyme* and various forms of material inscriptions.

2Before 1400: Narrated Inscriptions as Markers of Otherness

Before 1400, narrated inscription is not much of a concern in literary texts. In the famous Castilian verse epic *Cantar de Mio Cid* (c. 1200) or the royal chronicles of the Kings Jaume I (c. 1250) and Pere III (c. 1380), scenes involving writing are limited to a more or less marginal exchange of letters or the presence of administrative documents.[230] Writing on materials other than parchment or paper does not feature. Epitaphs in stone fulfil a merely documentary function.[231] Inscriptions on other architectural elements appear preferentially in the context of a remote (mythical) past. They function as a fictional *ekphrasis* of an imaginary otherworld different from the one in which the literary characters live. Material writing appears in the *Sumas de la historia troyana de Leomarte* (1350) and also in the first chapters of *General Estoria* or the *Crónica de 1344*, which narrate the legendary origins of the Jewish, Greek and Roman civilisations.[232] In contrast, the chronicles mention normal paper or parchment writing as soon as they reach more recent historical events and Iberian settings. In these later passages, the narrative and even the hero's miracles or dream-visions do not contain any inscriptions, privileging instead images, symbolic colours and pictorial emblems.[233]

The legend of King Rocas in the *Estoria de España* is a particularly revealing example.[234] An interesting passage (ch. 11) concerning the value of material inscriptions is inserted into the mythical prehistory of Southern Spain. The first settlements like Cádiz, Osuna, Granada and Toledo were founded by Hercules, the Greek King Pyrrhus, and a certain oriental King Rocas, who descended from paradise. Leaving Eden in search of universal

wisdom (*los saberes*), he finds a marvellous place somewhere in a land "between Orient and North", where 70 rich pillars made of marble and brass present the exhaustive writings of "all knowledge and the nature and function of things" (*todos los saberes e las naturas de las cosas e cuemo sauien dobrar*). It is symptomatic that the mythical founder then acts like the scribes working for Alfonso: Rocas translates the texts into a book, transforming the mythical, locostatic materiality into a mobile and human-made book (*fizo* […] *un libro que traye consigo*).[235] This helps him to re-activate a hidden (divine?) knowledge which had collapsed with the toppled pillars (*pilares* […] *yazien en tierra*), and make practical use of the prophetical revelations contained therein. Rocas then travels on and becomes an epigrapher himself:

> *fasta que llego a Troya antes que fuess destroyda la primera uez*. […] *e uino por aquel logar o fue depues poblada Roma, y escriuio en un marmol quatro letras de la una parte que dizien Roma; y estas fallo y depues Romulo quando la poblo, e plogol mucho porque acordauan con el so nombre, e pusol nombre Roma*. (13)
>
> He even came to Troy before it was destroyed for the first time […], and he came to the place whereafter Rome had to be built, and there he wrote into a marble four letters saying "Roma". And those letters found afterwards Romulus when he settled the town, and he was very pleased that the letters correponded to his proper name and named it Roma.[236]

In a subtle way, the chronology of the well-known historical facts (the destruction of Troy, the foundation of Rome) is inverted here, placing the founding father Rocas before all others; Romulus simply follows King Rocas's lead when he finds prophetical inscriptions already at the site where he will found Rome (*escriuio en un marmol quatro letras de la una parte que dizien Roma; y estas fallo y depues Romulo quando la poblo*). Thus, history is perceived in an alternative way, relativizing the common foundational fictions from another epistemic viewpoint. Through the chronological precedence of the material inscriptions, the naming and settlement of the Spanish towns recounted before and after the Rocas episode also appear supernaturally ordained, stemming from a source outside of the flow of human history.

The association of architectural inscriptions with a remote, authoritative past may account for the appeal such phenomena held for narrative accounts of fantastical otherworlds, as we will also find later on in chivalric literature. Two further examples illustrate this otherness generated by narrated inscriptions, this time representing cultural rather than historical alterity. Both

texts are translations from other cultural contexts that afterwards become productive sources for the Iberian imaginary. The first example concerns the influence of Arabian textuality in the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages. The presence of inscriptions within story-worlds could be seen as a reflection of Iberian cultural realities since calligraphic writing was an omnipresent visual phenomenon in Muslim urban spaces. However, I would argue that Arabian philosophy and poetics have a more profound influence, introducing not only new ideas and concepts, but intervening on stylistic or discursive levels.[237]

Calila e Dimna (1251) features a fictional inscription that is transformed into doctrinal truth.[238] This Castilian version of an Arabian narrative manual of wise behaviour and statecraft entitled كليله و دمنه (*Kalila wa-Dimna*), itself translated from Sanskrit in the seventh century, was introduced in Castile at the time of King Alfonso X, called *el Sabio* (1221–1284), a time when Christian, Jewish and Muslim religion and culture coexisted in the Castilian kingdom. Alfonso's encouragement of scholarship and translation in particular introduced many Arabic (and thereby also Greco-Roman) texts to Europe. In chapter XIV the conversing protagonists, a King and a Philosopher, discuss a town gate bearing an inscription. The Philosopher relates:

> *"Et ninguno non puede por arte nin por seso desuiar lo que dios le judgo e prometio de antes. Et esto paresçe en el enxemplo del rrey que fizo escriuir sobre la puerta de su çibdat que dezian Matrofil, que el buen entendimiento e la valor e la femençia e la arte en este mundo todas son en poder de la ventura."* (441)
>
> "And nobody can by ruse or by ingenuity alter the course of what God has judged and provided for him beforehand. And this appears in the example of the King who had written on the gate of his town, named Matrofil, that good understanding and value and strength and art in his world all are in the hands of fortune."

A long *exemplum* follows explicating the inscription, describing a prince who wanders as a vagrant until one day, as he sits *incognito* under the city gate of a foreign town, he observes a coronation ceremony and is himself finally recognised as the crowned prince's long lost brother, thereby recuperating his royal honour and wealth. The narrative concludes by emphasizing that the vagrant-king writes down the moral lesson of the tale on the city gate (*fizo escriuir sobre la puerta de su çibdat*), not only marking the very spot where the crucial encounter took place but also turning the gate into a material document for the very message of the narration: that everything depends on fortune (*que el buen entendimiento e la valor e la femençia e la arte en este*

mundo todas son en poder de la ventura). The gate itself, as setting *and* source of the narration, links the fictional scene with the "truth" of a stable wise saying outside of the text. The inscription remains fixed on the gate to be referred to in the frame narrative of the King in conversation with the Philosopher, and remains fixed in the text of *Calila e Dimna* for the use of every (aristocratic) reader. The prince himself

> *mando escreuir a la puerta de la çibdat estas palabras: "Laz*[*erio*] *de vn omne que fara por sus manos en vn dia, puede* [*ga*]*nar a el e a tres conpañeros de comer e de beuer. Et compl*[*imiento*] *en el omne de beldat e de buen enseñamiento e grant l*[*inaje*] *faze le ganar amor de los omnes e faze le perder soledat*, [*maguer*] *sea estraño e fuera de su tierra, et faze le ganar en vn* [*dia çient*] *maravedis*. […] *Et todas las cosas son por el juyzio de Dios et por ventura asy, ca non ha cosa de quantas Dios crio que se pueda mudar vn paso nin cuydar fazer alguna cosa sy non por el mandado de Dios et por lo que ha prometido e judgado. Et todas las cosas son en Su poder, e El las mantiene et El se torna, que ninguno non sabe commo las ordena nin commo las confirma."* (452f.)
>
> ordered that these words be written on the town gate: "the hard manual work of a man in one day can give him and three other people to eat and to drink. To accomplish with beauty and good education and nobility makes him gain the love of others and lose solitude, even if he is far away from home, and let him earn in one day 100 Maravedis. […] And everything is like this, for the judgment of God and Fortune, because there are no things in the divine creation that could move a step or try to do something if it is not for the order of God and for His promise and judgment. And everything is in His power, and He keeps and changes things, while nobody knows how He orders and confirms them."

Obviously, the very lengthy "inscription" is not only fictive but also allegorical, as the text is not generally concerned with narrative plausibility or verisimilitude. The inscription, however, serves—like a "reality effect" in the narration—as a marker of the static conceptual base underlying the pragmatics of the text. This technique of fixing doctrinal or instructive messages in space enters, perhaps through Arabic textual influence, into Christian theological tractate literature, as we will also see with Ramon Llull.

A second example for the modelling of otherness through inscription concerns a "colonial" ambiance in medieval Iberia. In Fernández de Heredia's (Catalano-)Aragonese version of the *Libro de Marco Polo* (1396) material writing is part of the description of marvellous alien cultures.[239] While Marco Polo's travel narrative is obviously not an indigenous Iberian text, it is of particular significance for Iberian literature because Marco Polo's narration of his travels in China presents a model for the depiction of

marvellous settings that we later find in some accounts of the colonial Spanish empire from the sixteenth century onwards, such as Alonso de Ercilla's *La Araucana* (1569–1589).[240] In the context of the travel narrative's pre-colonial "exoticism", the Far Eastern world of the Gran Chan is as full of text-bearing architecture as the classical Roman and mythological spaces. The *grant palaçio del senyor*, for example, exhibits a stunning golden opulence, with inscribed furniture. The text describes several tables made of gold and engraved with the pictures of a lion and an elephant, and then insists on the material value of those objects before presenting the inscription they all share:

> *Por la fuerça del grant dios et de la gracia que ha dada al nuestro imperio, el nombre de nuestro buen can sea bendicho, et todos aquellos que no lo obedeceran sean destruydos et muertos*. (21)
>
> For the power of God and the grace He has given to our empire, the name of our good Khan is blessed, and all those who do not obey will be destroyed and killed.

In Marco Polo's setting, material opulence (gold or silver) goes along with the fascination of alterity suggested by the exotic lion and elephant, but also combines with the vocabulary of imperialism: economic value, military conquest and a theological justification based on divine and historical providence.[241] Interestingly, we will find similar narrations of luxurious text-bearing furniture again in "imported" Arthurian narratives, but also in doctrinal texts, such as those of the Majorcan philosopher Ramon Llull.

3Ramon Llull: Doctrinal Landscapes and Tangible Writing

Material writing which becomes visible and tangible within the narrated world is central to Ramon Llull's didactic dialogues. His texts, written c. 1270–1305 in both Latin and Catalan (and some in Arabic), develop a whole "combinatorial" system of moral philosophy adapted to Christian thinking. This system, developed in his texts *Art Abreujada d'Atrobar Veritat*, *Ars generalis ultima*, *Lògica nova* or *Arbre de ciència*, is accompanied by diagrams that translate allegorical concepts into visible patterns. He uses, for example, a tree as an organic subdivision system, or a ladder leading to heaven to illustrate an argument's logical sequentiality and teleological orientation. However, this visuality is not only represented in the manuscript illuminations, but also inserted

into the text itself. In his *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis* (c. 1275), Llull fictionalises his doctrinal and philosophical material by creating a minimalist narrative setting for his dialogues.[242]

Much like Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, Llull's moral dialogues are situated in a *locus amoenus* which in Llull's text also becomes a material surface on which the essence of the philosophical account is written. Three wise men and a pagan wander through a beautiful landscape, where they encounter five blooming trees and meet the Lady Understanding, whom they ask

> *que·ls dixés la natura de les proprietats dels V arbres, ni que significaven les letres qui eren escrites en cascunes de les fflors*. (9)
>
> to explain the nature and properties of the five trees, and the signification of the letters written on each of the flowers.

In the *locus amoenus*, the pagan (*el gentil*) and three monotheistic wise men (representing Judaism, Islam and Christianity) discuss the theological value of virtues (seven divine and seven created virtues) and mortal sins. In each of the trees' flowers one substantive is inscribed (*bonea, granea, eternitat, poder, saviea, amor, perfecció, fe, esperança, caritat*, etc.). The characters carry on their debate by picking one flower after the other from the trees. The landscape with the tree figures as a narrative realisation of five schematic illustrations in the beginning of the text (*al comensament d'aquest llibre*) combining the virtues and sins.[243] The logic of the argument thus also follows the schematic sequentiality of these "combinatorics". With the self-referential comment referring to the illustration, the book doubles its expressive possibilities in pictorial and linear narrative argumentation. By creating these parallel modes of mediation, Llull actually "mechanizes" the narrativization of theology.[244] The inscriptions are not immediately legible, however. As in Dante's *Commedia*, the protagonists need the guidance of a wise allegorical figure, here *dona Entallegencia*. The reader identifies with the learning pagan and thereby discovers the points of doctrine together with the fictional characters. In addition to the great mnemonic potential and plasticity of visualization, the text-bearing flowers also present an aesthetic or even synaesthetic dimension: it is not only possible to read, but also to see and smell them (*veer e odorar les fflors*).

In his *Blanquerna* novel (1282) Llull goes even further by adding a narrative framework to his discussion of doctrine and materializing his apologetical writing within this imaginary world.[245] The vital learning process of the young Blanquerna, wandering through the deserted landscape, becoming a monk,

bishop and, ultimately, a hermit entirely dedicated to contemplation, is actually comparable to the Arthurian hero's *parcours* and a chivalric sequence of literary spaces. Blanquerna encounters an allegorical building with a long inscription on the entrance portal spelling out the Ten Commandments in golden and silver letters. As they are disdained in the world, the inscription goes on to explain, the Commandments have withdrawn to this hall to lament. The engraving on the portal does not fail to affect Blanquerna:

> *Molt fortment fo meravellat Blanquerna con hac llestes les paraules qui eren escrites sobre el portal; e tocà a la porta e volc entrar en lo palau per veer los deu Manaments*, (107f.)
>
> Blanquerna was very awed when he had read those words written on the portal; and he touched the door and wanted to enter in the palace to see the Ten Commandments,

which he finds inside personified as seated statues each holding a book.

In this passage, the wording of the Ten Commandments engraved in stone appears as an irrevocable and inalterable truth that predates human understanding. It is obvious that the marvellous palace is not built by human beings. Its inhabitants, the personified text-monuments, are both physically tangible and audible characters; they speak directly to Blanquerna and incarnate a written text to which they give voice. The narration duplicates the literary mediation between architectonic inscriptions and the personified voices, creating a total encounter between the protagonist and the textually grounded doctrinal level. Furthermore, the levels and modes of textual mediation are multiplied between a) the gate inscription, b) the inner walls bearing inscriptions of the human sinners, and c) the personifications holding books that register every sinner. Gumbrecht describes such a narrative strategy as "presentification".[246] Prior to a deeper hermeneutic and rational understanding of the writing, the protagonist finds himself confronted with "text" as a lived experience that operates on all levels of sensory perception. In this sense, Blanquerna's characteristic wonderment (*molt fortment fo mervellat Blanquerna con hac llestes les paraules*) also recalls the epic heroes of the Arthurian tradition, in which writing as a transcendental phenomenon forms part of the enchanted world of *aventures*.

Doctrine is materialised in Llull's texts in a marvellous, alien and supernatural fictional setting which merges with the

traditional topoi of *locus amoenus* and *eremus*. The inscription on the portal evokes the text-bearing pillars in *Estoria de España* and the gate in *Calila e Dimna* and likewise materialises doctrinal knowledge in the fictional world. This knowledge aligns the narration with the moral system of the "real" world. Given the place of Llull's works as exemplary of the intellectual engagements catalysed by the so-called *convivencia* of medieval Iberian Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities, the similarity between *Blanquerna* and *Calila e Dimna* suggests that ties between these three literary traditions also included fictional conceptualizations of material writing.

This tendency to materialise abstract doctrinal knowledge within the fictional world is reinforced in the fifteenth century with the emergence of Petrarchism on the Iberian Peninsula. Doctrinal narrations often combine a Llullian setting and dialogue form with Petrarchan topics and increase the presence of allegory and emblematic figures.[247] These texts feature the rudimentary narrative structure of a quest for knowledge that includes inscriptions. Alfonso de la Torre's *Visión deleytable* from 1440 demonstrates that such a narrative structure also works well with mystic ascension.[248] This text, in the form of an allegorical dream, illustrates the journey of Entendimiento, personified Understanding, to the "high mountain" of wisdom, confronting successive visions of allegorical spaces and personifications (Verdat, Razón, Fortaleza etc.) along the way. As in Llull's texts, inscriptions appear both in the stylised landscape setting and as attributes on the bodies of the personifications. In the description of the personifications, material writing combines with the omnipresent symbol of literate culture, a "book":

> [*la donzella*] *en la siniestra tenía un libro çerrado, e en somo de las vestiduras tenía unas letras griegas e latynas en que dezía "Ornatus et persuasio"* (124)
>
> In her left hand the young lady holds a closed book, and on her clothes she had some Greek and Latin letters saying "Ornatus et persuasio"[249]

The *Visión deleytable* combines graphic, auditive and pictorial elements. Text-bearing artefacts such as clothing, walls and emblematic accessories halt the narrative movement and create visual, pictorial moments in the texts. From an epistemological point of view, this multimedia relation between writing and image, or between visualization and oral reading, is also informed by pre-modern theories of vision and perception. According to these theories, the storing and re-evocation of inner *species* provide a mnemotechnical structure for the organization of understanding and memory.[250] Like characteristic physical

attributes, inscriptions can therefore aid the mental processing of abstract, doctrinal knowledge. While the theme of the encounter is laid out in the static allegorical inscriptions, an oral dialogue further develops its significance. Additionally, the protagonist's understanding is supported by a secondary visual dimension: the content of the dialogue is simultaneously depicted on the walls. Thus, the preceding "truth" of the spoken doctrine is cemented beforehand within the fictional world:

> *E estas cosas por orden declaradas, la donzella, fecha fin a su fabla, estovo en un agradable sylençio. E entonçes el Entendimiento paró mientes en las paredes de la casa e vido todas las cosas susodichas e pintadas por orden.* (114)
>
> And as those things were fairly declared, and the young lady stopped talking she was in a pleasant silence. And then, Understanding fixed his attention on the walls of the house and saw all the things that have been told above painted in the right order.

Fixing the protagonist's gaze on the pictures (*paró mientes*), the narration halts for a reflective moment of comprehension—a comprehension which is not only hermeneutic and analytic, but pervades all senses. Between mystical ascension and a hero's learning *parcours*, those doctrinal texts evoke two different textual traditions, showing the adaptive flexibility and fusion of diverse discursive practices. As we will see, textual patterns of different literary genres such as mystical treatise, religious prose and chivalric novels can be combined for a new textual pragmatics.

4From Arthurian Chivalry to Mysticism: Narrative Logic and Wonder

The "Arthurian colour"[251] of these doctrinal and philosophical treatise show how flexibly Iberian literatures retextualised literary inspirations. Since scholars can only examine Arthurian texts in Iberian vernaculars by way of their surviving early modern transcriptions, the impact of the initial medieval Iberian reception of the Matter of Britain is difficult to estimate.[252] The first dating of a closer Vulgata translation being 1313, in a sixteenth-century manuscript of the Portuguese *Josep Abaramatia* (an adaption of *Estoire de Saint Graal*), the earlier diffusion of the Arthurian texts seems to have been underestimated.[253] Indeed, several texts of the fourteenth century, without being proper translations, show Arthurian motifs,[254] but do not pay attention

to narrated inscriptions. The "Arthurian" texts presenting numerous and creative new re-modellings of this phenomenon only appear in manuscripts from the late fifteenth century.[255] Proper translational adaptions concerning the Post-Vulgate-cycle are, for example, *El baladro del sabio Merlín con sus profecías* (first printed in Burgos in 1498),[256] the manuscript MS 1877 of Biblioteca Universitaria de Salamanca, compiled in 1467–1470 by Petrus Ortiz and containing the *Libro de Josep Abarimatía*, *Estoria de Merlín* and *Lançarote* (the latter corresponding to *Mort Artu*), or *La demanda del Sancto Grial* (c. 1470).[257] In this latter text, as in another version of *Lançarote del Lago* (anonymous, 1414),[258] written instructions to the hero in an enchanted sylvan landscape (*floresta*) frame the *parcours* of his adventures:

> [*Y*] *ante la hermita estava en el cimenterio vna Cruz en un padrón de marmól. Y quando Don Lançarote vido la cruz, cató sobre el padrón y vio letras vermejas que dezian: "Oyes, tú, cavallero andante que buscas las aventuras, si tú no quieres tu muerte o tu desonra, guarda que no entres en esta floresta, ca te non podras ende partir sin una d'estas dos cosas."* (339)
>
> [And] in front of the hermitage on the cemetery there was a cross in a marble column. And when Don Lançarote saw this cross and looked on the column and saw red letters that said: "Listen, errant knight in search of adventures, if you do not want death or dishonour, keep from entering this forest, because you won't be able to come out again without suffering one of the two."

The writing addresses the hero directly (*oyes tu Cauallero andante*). The fictional world itself is given an intradiegetic voice. Yet, the protagonist does not answer or react—he makes the narration pause for a meta-commentary. The hero's examination of the inscription, which is also the script of his fatal *parcours*, directs the reader's eye to the inherent logic of the discourse. The prophetic writings, existing solely to be found by the hero and suggesting imminent danger with red letters, create suspense and guarantee narrative coherence at the same time. Just as with the 70 pillars in the legend of King Rocas, the protagonist is confronted with material writing which arises from the inner logics of the world (and the text) and predates human understanding and activity. The magic writing here functions as a (purely textual) meta-commentary on the meaningfulness of the narration and of textuality in general.

A more flexible, genuine Iberian reception and adaptation of Arthurian themes became very popular up until to the fifteenth century. Of special interest is the *Amadís*-cycle, created during the fourteenth century but surviving in Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo's version from 1496, and printed 1508 in Zaragoza.

Since most of the *Amadís*-cycle dates from the sixteenth century,[259] I will concentrate on Montalvo's first book, *Amadís de Gaula*, written before 1500. Amadís's *parcours* is also replete with magic inscriptions that inscribe his success and heroism into the very landscape. In one of the first scenes of the novel, Amadís arrives on a hidden island with his beloved Oriana and his chivalric friends, where a enchanted and opulent architectural complex erected by a former king and his beloved tests who is the new *leal amador* and most worthy knight. The names of the most perfect couple magically appear on the walls of a gate when the "ones" march through it—launching at the same time an interplay of synaesthetic automata:

> *"Pero si tal caballero, o dueña, o donzella aquí viniere que sean dinos de acabar esta Aventura por la gran lealtad suya* [...] *entrarán sin nengún entrevallo, y la ymagen hará tan dulce son que muy sabroso sea de oýr a los que lo vieren, y estos verán las nuestras ymágenes, y sus nobres scriptos en el jaspe, que no sepan quién los escrive." Y tomándola por la mano a su amiga, la fizo entrar debaxo del arco, y la ymagen fizo el dulce son, y mostróles las ymágenes y sus nombres dellos en el jaspe scriptos*. (I. 366)

> "But when such a knight or lady or young lady, worthy to finish this adventure by their great faithfulness, come here, [...] they will enter without delay, and the image will emit such a sweet sound that it will be a pleasure for them who will see it, and those will also see our pictures, and their names written in the jasper without knowing who writes them." And taking his beloved by the hand, he made her enter under the arch, and the image emitted the sweet sound and showed them the pictures and their names written in the jasper.

The magic writing was programmed by a former hero and appears by itself. Thus, the value of the new hero is already inscribed in the fictional world and has to be accepted as an *a priori* truth. His proper name, engraved in jasper, naturally corresponds to his "realistic" (read: recognizable) visual representation. The hero is validated by the coincidence of both the name and the picture, and by an acoustic sign. Via the stone inscription, the fictional setting itself confirms the truthfulness of the plot.

A narrative programme may also be inscribed into the very flesh of the hero, as the *Amadís*-cycle illustrates in the tale of Amadis's son Esplandián. The knowledge of the hero's genealogy and condition are closely linked in the narrative to the "reading" of his bodily marks. After Oriana gives birth to Esplandián a troubling discovery is made on the newborn's body. Undressing him,

> *vieron que tenía debaxo de la teta derecha unas letras blancas como la nieve,*

y sola teta isquierda siete letras tan coloradas como brasas bivas (II. 654)

they saw that he had under his right breast some snow-white letters, and under the left breast seven letters deeply red like living fire.

The magic writing on his breast is bicoloured and illegible: the red and white letters are in incomprehensible Latin and Greek (*de latín muy escuro y* [...] *en lenguaje griego muy cerrado*). Like the fictional characters, the reader is confronted with a "dark" (*escuro*) enigma. Over the course of Esplandián's numerous adventures the letters of his inscribed destiny become legible as his name and the name of his beloved, the only one capable of making the letters speak. As in Llull's schematic tree-writings, the meta-writing on the body of the hero reveals the narrative development of the whole plot and thus appears as a shortened, emblematic micro-narrative.

The inscribed messianic child of romance recalls marvellous scenes of "holy writing" found in hagiographical and mystical texts. A number of holy men likewise have their sanctity confirmed by inscriptions on their breasts, such as Lazaro in the *Cancionero de Juan Fernández de Íxar* (c. 1470), who is found with letters inscribed into his heart

que dezian asy: con el mio Ihesu Christo. E asy los medicos entendieron la condiçion de aqueste onbre, e dixeron que era muerto de soberana alegria. (LXXVIII. 697f.)

saying: "With my Jesus Christ". And so the doctors understood the condition of this man and said that he had died from sovereign joy.

The ignorant physicians, limited to a profane, experimental approach, are confronted by this miraculous inscription, prior to human understanding. Whereas Esplandián's breast-inscription prefigures his heroic path, the destiny of the saint's life is already written in his heart. In the well-known legend of Saint Ignatius, the heart-inscription is multiplied. As the collection of *Sermones de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro de León* recounts, Ignatius,

en la tribulaçión suya andando sobr'el fuego, sienpre dezía el nonbre de Ihesú si el fuego non le enpesçió. Preguntáronle por qué dezía aquel nonbre tantas vezes e rrespondió que assí estava sellado en su coraçón, que lo non podía partir de su boca. E quando muere el bueno de Inaçio, abriéronle el coraçón en muchas partes e en cada parte le fallan el nonbre de Ihesús escripto de letras de oro. (236)

who in his tribulation walked on fire, was always spelling out Jesus' name when fire didn't hurt him. They asked him why he repeated this name so many times and he answered that the name was so much sealed within his heart that he couldn't quit it from his mouth. And when this good Ignacio

died, they opened up his heart in many places and everywhere they found Jesus' name written in golden letters.

Though Ignatius's invocation of the name of Jesus Christ seems to allow him to walk on fire without being burned, the sacred name nevertheless leaves a miraculous mark. The physicians examining his corpse find the holy name engraved in golden letters wherever they cut into his heart. In contrast to the example of Lazaro, the writing here is not affixed to any particular place; rather, it is mobile and ephemeral, and appears only to the eyes of the incredulous public.

In accounts of saints like Ignatius, religious persuasive power and narrative surprise come together in a conception of the marvellous that needs tangible, material stories to make concrete a doctrinal "truth". These supposedly documentary tales of the saints' bodies reverberate in the mystical texts of the Iberian sixteenth century. Nevertheless, in the poetical attempts to articulate the marks of holiness, both the corporal dimension and the aspect of writing tend to be re-allegorised, becoming merely textual references. According to her own poetry, Teresa de Ávila's heart bore an inscription engraved by God himself. Functioning as a refrain, this inscription becomes the structural framework of the poem:

Vivo sin vivir en mí
y tan alta vida espero
que muero porque no muero.
Vivo ya fuera de mí,
después que muero de amor,
porque vivo en el Señor,
que me quiso para sí;
cuando el corazón le di
puso en mí este letrero:
"Que muero porque no muero".
(955f.)

I live without living in myself,
and I hope to have so high a life,
that I die because I do not die.
I live now outside of myself,
after I'm dying of love
because I live in the Lord
who claimed me for himself;
when I gave him my heart
He put on it this label,
"That I die because I do not die".

The message on the tablet in the nun's heart indicates the allusive wordplay, typical of seventeenth-century Spanish Conceptism, which underlies the entire poem: the paradoxal impossibility of living before death (*Que muero porque no muero*). The inscription marks the body as the very arena of this existential combat. At the same time, God's intimate heart-writing also appears as the origin and motor of the poem's structural logic. The link between hagiography, chivalric models and even mystical texts (such as though Teresa de Avila, Juan de la Cruz or Luis de León), which all fashion an amalgamation of body and text, is suggestive and requires more detailed study.[260] As a special form of meta-

textuality which works as a visualisation of the textual structure and as *mise en abyme* of the inherent logic of a hero's development, narrated inscriptions also reveal the permeability of genres. In Llull's doctrinal landscapes, the magic world of the knights and the transcendent experiences of the mystic, "presentification" via material writing allows the reader to perceive a hidden "truth" uncovered with the help of text.

5Material Scripture and Poetics: Visual Communication in the Courtly Romance

Gradually, narrated inscriptions become independent from the narrative plot as soon as they become a stage for poetic expression. In the Arthurian (post-Vulgate) text *El baladro del sabio Merlín*, we find a first example for this poetization of material scripture. The 1498 print version by Juan de Burgos is an interesting case study for the development of chivalric literatures on the Iberian Peninsula. As H. L. Sharrer first pointed out, a comparison of the French *Suite du Roman de Merlin* (Ms Huth) and the Iberian versions reveals important changes.[261] The episode of the love affair of King Assen's son Anasteu is significantly modified in that the unfortunate couple is killed off.[262] But of the two Castilian print versions (1498 Burgos and 1535 Sevilla) only the 1498 version introduces an epitaph on the grave of the young lovers. The infante, tragically forced by his father to kill his beloved, mortally wounds himself, and orders his servants to persuade the king to construct a funeral monument for them. The next day, his father finds his dead son and hears his last will, in particular the funerary inscription to be put on their grave:

> "*Bien como cisne que llora su muerte quando consiste,*
> *que la dize e la memora con aquel gemido triste,*
> *así mi mal lloraré con un sospiro profundo*
> *la vida que dexaré de aqueste cativo mundo.*
> *Lloraré mis tristes males*, […];
> *lloraré la fin venida de aquesta que muerta veo,*
> *pues que la fin de su vida dio morir a mi deseo.*"
> (III. 68–70)

> "Like the swan weeping his dead when it is a question of
> telling and memorizing it, with this sad moaning
> so will I complain my suffering with a profound sigh,
> the life in this unhappy world that I will leave.
> I will cry over my sad sufferings, […]
> I will cry over the end of the person that I see dead

because the end of her life gave death to my desire."

Curiously, this inscription corresponds exactly to the "Lamentación de Grimalte" made in front of Fiometa's grave in Juan de Flores's Castilian sentimental romance *Grimalte e Gradissa* (c. 1495).[263] In this novel, largely inspired by Boccaccio's *Fiammetta*, the medieval chivalric spirit and a new courtly Renaissance ambiance come together.[264] Vice versa, the affinity of the 1498 *Baladro* to the sentimental genre shows the editor Juan de Flores's attempt to link medieval chivalric and courtly Renaissance patterns.[265] In any case, the narrated inscriptions play an entirely different role in this "sentimental" context into which the Arthurian model is transposed. The inscriptions are no longer the result of a marvellous or divinely inspired landscape where they fulfil an informative function intimately linked to the workings of the narrative and the implicit development of the hero. Instead, the cited grave inscriptions are poetic materializations marginal to the narrative's plot and increasingly independent from it. As a lyric commentary on the plot, they serve to underline a heightened sensibility for artistic invention and allegorical depth.

As we have seen in both Teresa de Ávila's poem and in the Arthurian adaptations, an increasing poetization of the inscriptions turns them into lyrical parentheses and converts the text into a pastiche of prose and poetry fragments.[266] A similar tendency can be observed in the original *novelas caballerescas* and *sentimentales* which prefigure further narrative developments in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Castilian Golden Age (*Siglo de Oro*). The flexibility with which lyrical fragments can be inserted into narrative plots suggests that both the chivalric and the sentimental romance become ingenious literary exercises, giving (sometimes ironical) winks to the reader who has to decipher the poetic outcome of the author's intertextual links. From a historical perspective, these poetical insertions into prose narratives and the poetical re-elaboration of well-known lyrical fragments have been linked to the increasing popularity of tournament practices.[267] The short poems collected during the tournaments held in 1474 in Valladolid by the Catholic Kings and compiled in the fifth part of Hernando de Castillo's *Cancionero General* (printed in 1511 in Valencia), show the social importance and the great poetic impact of this micro-genre that combines emblematics and poetry, letters, images and (self-)performance.[268]

From the second half of the fifteenth century onwards, this genre of *letras e invenciones* was successively introduced into

fictional texts such as Diego de San Pedro's sentimental romances *Arnalte y Lucenda* (1491) and *Cárcel de Amor* (1492)[269] and into the Old Valencian chivalric romance *Tirant lo blanc* (1490) by Joanot Martorell.[270] Much like the bodily writings in the *Amadís*-cycle, the protagonists carry inscriptions through the fictional world; but now their clothing becomes the preferred text-bearing surface, as a means of courtly self-fashioning.[271] In contrast to the hero's breast inscriptions which prescribe his core identity, vestimentary fashioning of a character's status is more dynamic and flexible. Furthermore, the artificial, human-made character of the inscriptions is emphasised. The challenge, for both protagonist and reader, of deciphering the inherent logic of a narrative world transforms here instead into a deliberate play between an ingenious textual invention and the reader's hermeneutic *and* aesthetic pleasure. Moreover, in the context of this poetical self-fashioning, the inscriptions allow the fictional characters to "write themselves". In the sense of Foucault's *écriture de soi*, they determine their subjectivity by means of poetical self-expression.[272]

In *Tirant lo blanc*, the first chivalric narrative with inserted *invenciones*, a complex interplay of changing text-bearing clothes accompanies the plot and builds a self-sufficient textual field with its own "micro-narrative" potential.[273] A silent but highly poetical dialogue of *letras* between the protagonist Tirant and his beloved Carmesina, the princess of Constantinople, is sewn onto their opulent dresses (I. 227). In the midst of his elegantly dressed followers, the hero Tirant stands out due to the ingenious textual adornment decorating his coat and his legs, an interplay of figurative elements in the form of ears made out of pearls and an embroidered inscription (*un mot brodat*) that reads: "One is worth a thousand, and thousands are not worth the one" (*Una val mill e mill no valen una*). The homophony between Catalan *mill* (thousand) and *mill* (ear) creates a pun linking text and image. Carmesina "answers" silently with another combination of text and image on her clothes. Her dress is covered with depictions of a mysterious plant called *amorvall* ("love counts") surrounded by inscriptions saying: "but not for me" (*Mas no a mi*). Thus, she implicitly rejects Tirant's courtship, even as Tirant's "invention" exalts both her and his value with an equally precious decoration.

The entire scene takes place in the presence of the king, who monopolises the spoken word (*l'Emperor* [...] *dix a Tirant*) while the two lovers only interact through their material wordplays—without any intradiegetical comment on their legibility or the reactions of others. Here Tirant and Carmesina figure as static,

emblematic text-monuments; ceding their own voices to the King, they convert themselves into texts.[274] Even as the scene depicts the characters' coded communications, the narrative focuses its attention on the reader's ability to imaginatively reconstruct a complex pictorial scene and to appreciate its poetic inventiveness.[275] Only through the narrator's commentary on the name of the pictured plants does the wordplay succeed. And only the reader can realise the relationship between the novel's narrative as a whole and the situational, emblematically frozen state of mind of the protagonists in this scene. As a poetic, purely textual meta-commentary on the narrative structure and as an alternative narrative development between the lines, the embroideries also stage the author's ingenuity, creating a kind of poetic tournament with the reader as spectator.[276]

Readers of this survey will no doubt have observed that narrated inscriptions in the Iberian literatures are hardly mimetic representations of inscriptions in the material world. Instead of representing a historical "reality" (i. e. an echo of existing text-bearing architecture or courtly tournament practices) the fictional urban settings and landscapes of Iberian literatures rather use inscriptions to underscore their artificial nature. Although they play with an imaginative potential framed within the *episteme* of the time, narrated inscriptions function as markers of fictionality, staging purely textual strategies: intertextuality and retextualization shape the *mise en scène* of these short "texts within the text", which function as metatextual or even metafictional commentaries. The material and visual presence of these metatextual fragments reveal the workings of the entire text. And, as we have seen in late medieval courtly romance (and in contrast to the Arthurian tradition), the inscriptions become increasingly alienated from the plot. The meta-commentary on texuality itself becomes an independent, alternative mode of expression alongside the course of the narrative.

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Materials

Michael R. Ott

Culture in Nature: Writing on Wood

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Apart from Scandinavia with its enduring runic tradition, most medieval literatures have little use for wooden inscriptions. This may come as a surprise given the ubiquity of such artefacts in the Middle Ages, which even lend their name to writing and written objects: etymologically, the Brothers Grimm proposed, the German word for letter (*Buchstabe*) and terms like Gothic *bôka* and Old Saxon *buok* derive from the early Germanic words for "beech tree" (*Buche* in present-day German).[277] Moreover, inscriptions in wood feature prominently in both antiquity and the early modern period, where we witness a large amount of narrated tree inscriptions especially in Pastoral poetry. These pastorals were closely linked to ancient textual traditions which were rarely available in the Middle Ages.[278] Consequently, there is a gap in vernacular literary history concerning tree inscriptions and wooden inscriptions in general,[279] beginning roughly with Vergil's *Eclogues* (c. 40 BCE) and ending with the Pastoral renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth century (e. g. Petrarch, Sannazaro, Boiardo) which subsequently shaped Europe's literary landscape.

This article examines some medieval exceptions in this void, turning first to the Scandinavian runic tradition and the Continental reminiscence of wood's magical power. Secondly I examine the sad, short, love story between the nymph Oenone and Paris, as retold in several accounts of the Trojan War. Finally, I take a closer look at Marie de France's and Gottfried von Straßburg's stories of Tristan and Iseult, both of which present letters on wood as a form of secret communication.

Although there is little evidence with which to develop a broader argument about inscriptions on wood, this scarcity is itself worth considering. In fact, instead of lamenting the sparsity of examples, we should make an argument of it. The rareness of writing on wood, I propose, is due to wood's categorisation as

part of the realm of nature rather than culture. As such, wood is a counterpart to the courtly sphere with its learned writing culture that heavily relies on prepared skin, monastic education, and the Latin language, to name just a few important aspects of cultural writing.[280]

Considering writing on wood as a practice peripheral to the domain of culture, it becomes plausible that the most mundane of historical artefacts appears in medieval literary tradition primarily in circumstances that make such inscriptions unusual, becoming emblematic of the occult (Scandinavia), associated with a distant past and with antique practices of writing (Trojan War), or functioning as a form of cryptography (Tristan). The latter seems especially important to me. Since (apart from Scandinavia) writing on wood can be used for deceitful or encrypted messages, the acts of writing and reading are framed by this special mode of communication. Consequently, writing on wood means writing by yourself, with your own hands. Writing on wood is mostly clandestine, personal, and hidden from public view. There are no scribes lending a helping hand and no messengers carrying letters and messages around. Hence, writing on wood creates a distance between courtly and therefore high-value writing on the one hand and low-value writing on the other hand. That does not mean, however, that there is only courtly writing at the court. As we will see with regard to Tristan and Iseult, speaking of a "court" does not necessarily mean a certain place, but rather a concept that transcends a particular material space.

1Vergil and Ariosto

It is worth emphasising—although probably not a complete surprise—that all my examples of inscriptions on wood deal with love attachment. Indeed, there seems to be a close bond between love and tree inscriptions reaching from antiquity until the present day. Passages from Vergil's *Eclogues* are particularly relevant and revealing, since they offer a narrative model on which many later texts rely. In the tenth and last eclogue, the Roman poet and politician Gallus mourns his beloved Lycoris, who has left him. In the course of his lament the desire to live the life of a shepherd also inspires him:

> I'm going to go and measure songs that I've set down
> in verse of Chalcis with the Sicilian grazer's oat:
> it's been decided to prefer to suffer in woods
> among the wild beasts' lairs and cut into tender trees
> my loves: the trees will grow; you also, loves, will grow.

(X, 50–54)

Here, “love” refers not only to the emotion, but also to a book of love songs Gallus wrote to mourn and remember his mistress (who crossed the Alps to the north with another man).[281] Thus, the tenth eclogue contains a metafictional reflection on the relationship between poetical and pristine forms of writing, as well as between singing, music, and the performance of poetry in general.[282] The reference to the growth of the trees introduces the question of posthumous fame; but it also addresses, on the most fundamental level, the notation and textualisation of the songs themselves. For textualisation provides the basis for a long-term reception. If poetry is meant to be permanently received, it has to be written down, somehow and some time.

Whereas Vergil marks one end of the above-mentioned void, Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, published in 1516 marks, the opposite end. In this late heroic epic the traditional rules of the knightly world are largely overridden, and formerly typical behaviour and actions are now in vain. The passage I am referring to shows us the hero as a desperate lover—and, interestingly, as a reader not (as in Vergil’s *Eclogues*) a writer. That is why the inscription(s) affect Orlando so profoundly.

As in the accounts of Tristan and Iseult, which we will examine later, there is a love triangle, namely between Orlando, Angelica and Medor. Orlando is in love with Angelica; but she hates him and loves Medor. In the twenty-third song, Orlando encounters numerous tree inscriptions with the names “Angelica” and “Medor” in a forest, some written in charcoal, some in chalk, and some scratched with the point of a knife. In the reasonably contemporary English translation of John Harington, completed in 1591, the relevant passage, worth quoting at length, reads as follows:

78.
For looking all about the grove, behold,
In sundrie places faire engrav’n he sees,
Her name whose love he more esteems then gold,
By her owne hand, in barks of diverse trees:
This was the place, wherin before I told,
Medoro usd to pay his surgeons fees,
Where she, to bost of that that was her shame,
Usd oft to write hers and *Medoros* name.

79.
And then with true love knots, and pretie poses,
(To shew how she to him by love was knit)
Her inward thoughts, by outward word discloses,

In her much love, to shew her litle wit.
Orlando knew the hand, and yet supposes,
It was not she, that had such posies writ,
And to beguile him selfe, rush rush (quoth he)
There may be more *Angelicas* then she.

80.
Yea, but I know to well, that pretie hand;
Oft hath she sent me, letters of her writing:
Then he bethinks, how she might understand,
His name and love, under that new inditing;
And how it might be done long time he scand,
With this fond thought, fondly him self delighting
Thus with small hope, much feare, all malcontent,
In these and such conceits the time he spent.

[…]

86.
Twise, thrise, yea five times he doth read the rime,
And though he saw, & knew the meaning plaine;
Yet, that his love was guiltie of such crime,
He will not let it sinke into his brayne,
Oft he perused it, and ev'ry time,
It doth encrease his sharpe tormenting paine,
And ay the more he on the matter mused,
The more his witts and sences were confused.[283]

Even though Orlando recognises the handwriting and understands its implications, he still tries to somehow convince himself it is not true. He does not want the text to be literal but to be a code or a deceitful message, meant to delude him. So, at first, he considers the idea that Angelica might have decided to use the name Medor for his own, for Orlando. But this is just the beginning of his mental deterioration. The improbable idea does not last long and the written characters in the forest lead to an increasingly desperate series of interpretative acts. Finally, when a shepherd reports that Angelica has taken care of the injured Medor, Orlando goes mad and falls into furious rage.

Orlando's inchoate madness causes him to lash out at the natural world, attacking in particular the trees carrying the writing. As this is his answer to the handwriting of Angelica and Medor, he not only becomes a reader, but a writer himself, furiously unwriting the tree inscriptions with his sword in order to wipe clean the traces of the past rendezvous. His undoing of the text-bearing natural world, however, redounds upon him: by slashing the inscriptions, Orlando strikes out his chivalric identity as well, casting away his weapons and clothes. So, in the end, it is not only reading, that leads to his madness, but destruction of the

cultural text that has been written into the woods.

2Odin and the *puella*

Orlando's frenzy in reaction to the letters inscribed in trees pales in comparison to the magical effects of runes in Old Norse poetry. Moreover, Orlando's crisis is precipitated by the information he learns by reading a script-bearing artefact. Madness as a result of an encounter with runic magic is a material effect of the script-bearing object itself; it is a psychic wound made by an occult weapon. Since this volume's article on Old Norse literature deals with runes and wooden inscriptions in detail, I will restrict my remarks to just one example, recounted by Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum*, which illustrates the magical quality of runes on wood.

Odin receives a prophecy from a magician that Rinda, the daughter of the Russian king, will bear him an avenger for his son Balder, who had been killed. Rinda, however, rejects his advances several times. Eventually, Odin strikes Rinda with a script-bearing wooden slat:

> Odin, however, had found by experience that nothing served eager lovers more than a tough persistence, and although he had been humiliated by two rebuffs he altered his looks a third time and approached the king, claiming unparalleled competence in military arts. […] Consequently the old veteran would give an admirable display of his professional skills by riding proudly to combat along with the most courageous. Despite this tribute the young woman remained inflexible. […] When on one occasion, just before departing, he wanted to snatch a kiss from her, she gave him such a shove that he was sent flying and banged his chin on the floor. Immediately he touched her with a piece of bark inscribed with spells and made her like one demented, a moderate sort of punishment for the continual insults he had received. (III, 77)

The inscribed bark proves to be a very effective and reliable means of "punishment", showing the power of magical inscriptions. Eventually, now disguised as a woman skilled in the art of healing, Odin manages to bind sick Rinda to her bed and to father a son by raping her.

Such a magical power attributed to writing on wood is, as far as I can see, mostly absent in other medieval literary cultures. One possible exception is preserved in *Carmina Burana*, a thirteenth-century collection of Latin and German songs, some of which probably date back to the eleventh century. A stanza that is loosely linked to two others, but can nevertheless be read as a separate entity, offers a whole plot in just a few words:

Stetit puella bi einem bovme,
scripsit amorem an eime lovbe.
dar chom Venus also fram;
caritatem magnam,
hohe minne
bot si ir manne.
(177,3 / 570f.)

A girl stood under a tree.
She wrote her love onto a leaf.
Then came Venus immediately.
Ample love,
courtly love,
she offered to her man.

In his commentary on this stanza, Benedikt Konrad Vollmann points out that the girl probably writes a love-charm and that writing on the leaf leads to the instantaneous appearance of Venus. Vollmann also assumes that the girl writes the name of her beloved onto the leaf.[284] If he is right, the girl does not write onto the leaf because it is conveniently at hand. The materiality of the artefact is actually relevant to the effectiveness of the writing, and the leaf is as an important material part of the charm.

The plucking of a leaf upon which to write highlights the fact that when it comes to writing on wood, one might speak of "biofacts" rather than artefacts. Biofacts, like bones or plants, may be considered as a subgroup of "ecofacts", of things that have developed naturally.[285] The distinction stems from archaeology, but becomes relevant as soon as we leave the realm of artefacts behind. Like "geofacts" (e. g. stone and sediments), which form another subgroup, biofacts are not human-made but are merely and without much processing used by humans. Of course, the boundaries of this classification are fluid since it is hard to define at what point an ecofact, handled by humans, becomes an artefact. But the distinction is nevertheless helpful in order to think of the enmeshing of nature and culture that seems especially poignant considering writing on living wood in contrast to, for example, the prepared animal skin that constitutes parchment.[286] As we see in the leaf inscription, there is no need to further prepare the leaf, no need to remake or alter it in order to use it for the intended purpose.

Even if the brevity of the *Carmina Burana* stanza forbids far-reaching conclusions, Ernst Doblhofer could be right when he observes at the end of his article on tree inscriptions, that "engraving the name of the beloved by the lover was the original custom" and that "name-charms and love-charms as two forms of superstition practiced in all times are originally behind the custom of carving names of the beloved in the bark of a tree".[287] Certainly, one has to be careful in speculating via a few examples about the original reason for engraving names into trees. But it is safe to say that love and the arrangement of relationships has something to do with writing on wood and on trees in particular.

3Oenone and Paris

The story of Paris and Oenone is one particularly striking example of the way writing on wood participates in the negotiation of the romantic relationship. The *Trojan War* of Konrad von Würzburg probably gives the most important version of a tree inscription in medieval German literature of the thirteenth century. It is also the only example I know of that corresponds to common ideas of tree inscriptions, insofar as it is unambiguously an inscription engraved into the bark of a tree. Considering the source, however, Paris's inscription is not surprising, since it is featured quite prominently in Ovid's *Heroides*, where it is depicted from Oenone's point of view, of course. In the fifth letter, addressed to Paris, Oenone writes:

> The beeches still conserve my name carved on them by you, and I am read there OENONE, charactered by your blade; and the more the trunks, the greater grows my name. Grow on, rise high and straight to make my honours known! O poplar, ever live, I pray, that art planted by the marge of the stream and hast in thy seamy bark these verses: IF PARIS' BREATH SHALL FAIL NOT, ONCE OENONE HE DOTH SPURN, / THE WATERS OF THE XANTHUS TO THEIR FOUNT SHALL BACKWARD TURN. (59, 21–30)

Since trees are living plants, the continued growth of the tree does something to the text, making Oenone's name larger and her honour more famous. Consequently, the rather documentary tree inscription becomes a monument and—in Oenone's view—a public accusation. The concrete inscription stands witness to this accusation and so does the tree, the poplar, apostrophised by Oenone.

The story leading to the inscription is well known: Paris, who has been marooned since birth in the forest, meets the nymph Oenone, who falls in love with him and demands a sign of his love. Paris then, as Konrad von Würzburg's *Der Trojanische Krieg* says, does what lovers used to do in such a situation and cuts a text in the bark of a tree. His inscription declares:

> *"man sol daz wizzen hiute*
> *und êweclichen iemer mê,*
> *sô Pârîs und Egenoê*
> *von ir minne scheident*
> *und beide ein ander leident,*
> *sô muoz diz wazzer wunneclich*
> *ze berge fliezen hinder sich*
> *und widersinnes riuschen."*
> (788–795)
>
> "Today and forever it shall be known that when Paris and Egenoe [= Oenone] desist from their love, and no longer like each other, then this pleasant river must flow backwards up the mountain, streaming in opposite direction."

Ironically, this explicit promise, which appears all the more

powerful when considered in light of the inscriptions of love magic discussed earlier, is near the end of the relationship between Oenone and Paris. He leaves Oenone shortly after this "scene of writing", awarding Aphrodite the famous apple and receiving Helen as a reward.

The term "Schreibszene" (scene of *writing*), theorised in German Studies for quite some time now, is a useful concept to consider in relation to this scene. On the one hand, the term addresses the materiality and perception of writing as an intricate process, combining body, technique, material and tools.[288] On the other hand, the concept of the "scene" highlights writing as a kind of performance, focusing attention on the representation of *acts* of writing, especially when writing becomes a problem and therefore an object of increased scrutiny. In terms of the Trojan scene, Paris uses a knife to cut "fine letters" (*schoene buochstaben*, 785) deep into the bark, thus creating not ephemeral and hasty marks, but a clear-cut document. For Oenone, who is explicitly said to have read the inscription, this has to look like a trustworthy act of faith, one that not only affects their relationship, but the course of nature.

Unfortunately for Oenone, the *adynaton* that refers to the impossibility of a river current flowing up a mountain is just a rhetorical gesture. And the act of inscribing a declaration of love is a mere gesture, too. The inscription as a staged scene of writing plays with expectations that are associated with tree inscriptions in general—in order to frustrate these expectations. Consequently, Paris's inscription is used here to emphasise not the beginning but the end of the relation between him and Oenone. The vow of love in the form of a tree inscriptions proves ineffective, for while Paris's act of writing may serve to reassure the amorous nymph, it does not create any reliable relationship, and certainly no reliable outlook on the future.

Finally, and perhaps even more significant: the nature of the text has changed. Time repurposes the words. What was a private declaration of love (addressed to the broader natural world, yes, but not a human community) has now become a public text, a historical monument attesting to Paris's betrayal and Oenone's suffering to society at large. Interestingly, the inscribed tree's role as a historical monument expands to represent the Trojan past itself in Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* when Alexander, eagerly seeking traces of early antiquity, discovers Oenone's poplar.[289]

4Tristan and Iseult

Wooden inscriptions are much more reliable as a means of communication between lovers in stories about Tristan and Iseult. Actually, as Urban Küsters has noted, "in texts about Tristan from the high-medieval period, pieces of wood are the preferred material in order to arrange secret rendezvous against the opposition of the inimical supervision".[290] Desperate times require the spontaneity afforded by biofacts, at least when love is involved. In order to arrange undisturbed meetings while under constant surveillance you have to use encrypted communication and appropriate media. That is why you need a convenient material, quickly acquired, easily inscribed, and inconspicuous. Once again the distinction between nature and culture is significant. Nobody expects to "read" things that are part of nature, even without encryption. Wooden messages are hiding in plain sight because of assumptions about writing as a quintessentially cultural artefact.

In Gottfried von Straßburg's German version of the legend, the brilliant idea to use wooden shaving to communicate comes not from Tristan, but from Brangaene. After all, her essential task throughout the novel is to help; and so she, more than any other character, is responsible for the secret contacts between the lovers. "'Since there is nothing better to do,'" she says,

> 'take my advice, nevertheless, for now and so long as you are separated from us. When you see that your chance has come, take a twig of olive, cut some slivers lengthwise, and just engrave them with a "T" on one side and an "I" on the other, so that only your initials appear, neither more nor less. Then go into the orchard. You know the brook which flows there from the spring towards the ladies' apartments? Throw a shaving into it and let it float past the door where wretched Isolde and I come out at all times of the day to weep over our misery. […]' (14421–14444)[291]

Brangaene's suggestions make use of the topography offered by the cultivated nature at (or near) the court. The message is quite simple, almost binary code, since agreeing on specific signs and a specific channel reduces the "noise" (read: the disturbance) in the transmission of a signal. Additionally, the engraved shavings feature a symbolic and iconographic dimension. Tristan and Isolde are united via the initials in the narrow space of the shavings, while the chips in the water are reminiscent of their crossing of the Irish Sea. But despite the writing and symbolism, the labelled chips are inconspicuous within the orchard's cultivated nature. In order to expect such a wooden message you have to know the code, you have to know what to look for. Seen as a form of communication, the wooden shavings have a low degree of publicity, much lower than framed inscriptions of

names in publicly accessible trees.

In Gottfried's *Tristan*, the choice of written characters (on wood) for the transmission of the signal depends also on the specific artistic characteristics of this romance. Apart from the text's acrostics, the written characters especially recall the poem's juxtaposition of the lovers, as for instance in lines 129f.: *ein man ein wîp, ein wîp ein man, / Tristan Isolt, Isolt Tristan*. These semiotic possibilities, put into practice by Gottfried von Straßburg's palindromes, are evoked by Tristan's inscription as well.

Interestingly similar to the encryption of the engraved slivers is Marie de France's account of the Tristan and Iseult story in *Chevrefoil*, Marie's shortest lai.[292] Tristan, who has been exiled by his uncle Mark, hears about a feast at Tintagel that Mark is planning. Since Iseult will be present, too, Tristan contacts her during her voyage:

Le jur que li reis fu meüz,
Tristram est el bois revenuz.
Sur le chemin que il saveit
Que la rute passer deveit,
Une codre trencha par mi,
Tute quarreie la fendi.
Quant il ad paré le bastun,
De sun cutel escrit sun nun.
(47–54)

On the day the king set out, Tristram entered
the wood along the road he knew the procession
would have to take. He cut a hazel branch in half
and squared it. When he had whittled the stick
he wrote his name on it with his knife.

Iseult, who keeps an eye out for the signal, spots the hazel branch and tells her company to halt. She pretends to go for a walk in order to rest, accompanied by her handmaiden Brenguein, and so manages to meet Tristan.

Much has been written about Marie's narration and the inscription in particular. In fact, this might be the most famous inscription on wood in medieval literature. And yet, the inscription is mostly discussed with regard to real-world phenomena, like tally-sticks and Ogham script.[293] To be sure, considerations of the material are important, since most of modern readers do not know much about hazel rods or honeysuckle. Basic commentaries on botanical characteristics, as provided for instance by William Sayers, help to regain cultural knowledge about the natural world likely familiar to medieval audiences.

In addition to such materially-specific considerations, I would argue that the conceptual opposition between nature and culture that informs how we perceive writing on trees, and on wood in

general, also lurks behind Marie's lai. Hence, the narrative carefully embeds the inscription into a web of activities of high cultural significance. *Chevrefoil* includes, "ingenuous tale and romance, written message and song, known story and new signification, in a variety of media: memory, ordinary speech, artistic language, writing on wood and on vellum".[294] These cultural activities contain and enclose the inscription, metamorphosing mundane acts of everyday communication into culturally prestigious writing.

This transformation also explains why Marie's Tristan does not merely write on a tree or bush. His writing is not a spontaneous act but a cultural exercise. He deliberately chooses the material carrier of his message with regard to its symbolic value. He also carefully prepares the material, making it more an artefact than biofact, challenging the boundary between nature and culture. In the end, the hazel rod with its inscription stands out for those who know what to look for. And it remains hidden for those who cannot see culture in nature.

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Inscriptions on Stone

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Stone is a fairly common material to be inscribed in medieval literature, and not merely because there are many artefacts consisting of stone—ranging from architectural elements, monuments (like statues or memorials), and tombs, to weapons, jewellery, talismans or tablets—in the medieval environment. An object made of stone is heavier than one of wood or parchment; it is long-lasting and resistant, transferring the message it bears across generations without losing its function as what Latour would call "an employee of its enunciate".[295] As a material, stone is resistant to the degree that it can even outlive linguistic changes, potentially rendering the message of an inscription less comprehensible to later readers.[296] This permanence characteristic of stone—what Jeffrey J. Cohen calls *linguistic endurance*—is compounded by the fact that it is nearly impossible to correct script in stone without damaging it.[297] Usually, inscriptions on stone are carved, chiselled, or moulded (though, in some cases, they can be applied by drawing or painting). The first two methods are the most traditional ways of inscribing text on stone; once the letters have been inscribed, they can hardly ever be erased, since parts of the material are carved out in order to create text. If corrections are carried out, they remain visible in most cases since more material has to be removed. These modifications of stone inscriptions, visible to the eyes of the receiver, then belong to the *biography* of the inscription. Stone suggests perdurance. Stone does not forget.[298]

Medieval texts with inscriptions in stone highlight this understanding of the endurance of stone suggesting that medieval authors recognised and emphasised the resistance of the material. This resistance makes stone the substance most amenable for preserving memory. One example, *Le Roman de Brut*, mentions an inscription on a stone memorial commemorating Rodric:

En la pierre out une escriture,	On the stone there is an inscription,
Mien escient ***ki encor dure****,*	that is still there today as far as I know,

Ki testemonie l'aventure	that testifies to the adventure
E conte la discunfiture,	and that tells about the destruction
Que Marius Rodric ocist	that Marius killed Rodric
E la pur ço la pierre mist.	and that is why he laid this stone,
***Encor i est**, ço oi retraire,*	it is still there, is what I have heard people say,
Si l'apele l'on Vestinaire.[299]	and they call it Vestinaire.[300]

(5177–5184, emphasis mine).

The author repeatedly mentions the durability of stone and that, as far as he knows, the stone can still be contemplated at the moment of his narration. With the words *ki encor dure* and *Encor i est*, he also implies that it might even be there in the future due to the resistance and longevity of stone.

Stone's durability can also reinforce the social significance of the inscriptions it bears, as illustrated by the famous stone tablets of Moses bearing the Ten Commandments.[301] The durable character of the material stone underlines the importance of the laws inscribed in the tablets, suggesting their universal and transhistorical relevance. The broad applicability of the law is also highlighted by how inscription linguistically defines its audience. Considering the semantic content of legal discourse, it should be noted that the recipient must remain relatively undefined, allowing a law to resonate across time. Nevertheless, the inscription of a law in stone symbolises the stability of its meaning. While the "Thou shalt not" of the Ten Commandments may seem self-evident, the typical linguistic register of a law distinctly differs from everyday language. A law usually contains fairly specific technical vocabulary in more complex sentence structures, paradoxically making it less accessible to the very public for whom it is designed. This is why linguists argue that the purpose of a legal text is not to be comprehensible to the public but to be translated and applied by professional lawyers.[302] Such a rather limited sociolinguistic target makes legal texts a very particular form of writing. We see this in medieval literature as well, where the stability of the material reinforces other methods of controlling the centrifugal aspects of language, such as, for instance, the use of Latin. A case in point is William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (1360–1399), in which the dreaming narrator Will meets Hope and discovers a document inscribed in stone:

"Lat se thi lettres," quod I, "we myghte the lawe knowe."	"Let's see the letters," said I, "[so that] we might know the law."
He plukkede forth a patente, a pece of	He picked up a patent, a piece of a

an hard roche,	hard rock,
Whereon was writen two wordes on this wise yglosed;	Whereon were written two edicts glossed in this manner:
Dilige Deum et proximum tuum—	*Love God and your neighbour—*
This was the tixte trewely—I took ful good yeme.	That was the text truly—I paid close attention.
The glose was gloriously writen with a gilt penne:	The gloss was gloriously written with a gilt pen:
In hiis duobus mandatis tota lex penhet et prophete.	*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*
(17.9–15)	

The inscribed legal text and gloss, a reference to Matthew 22:37–40 written in Latin, the socially privileged language of scholars, stands in contrast to the rest of the Middle English text. Even though the Ten Commandments are meant to be understood as religious and ethical guidelines that serve as the basis of social coexistence, the Latin paraphrase here makes them inaccessible to all but a few interpreters.

The stone tablets of the Old Testament feature in other medieval texts as a way of thinking about the divine will ordering not just a present society but time itself. The tablets present a sacred and divine form of writing, as we see in the Old English poem *Andreas*, when Andreas addresses the material stone, personifying it and honouring its role in the past:

Hwæt, ðu golde eart,	Hear me, you are better
sincgife, sylla! On ðe sylf cyning	than gold or gifts of treasure! On you the King
wrat, wuldres god, wordum cyðde	Himself, Glorious God, in His words revealed
recene geryno, ond ryhte æ	His mysteries in one instant and just laws
getacnode on tyn wordum,	in Ten Commandments did inscribe,
meotud mihtum swið. Moyse sealde,	Measurer wise in might! He gave them to Moses
swa hit soðfæste syðþan heoldon,	just as later with truth unwavering, they were kept
modige magoþegnas, magas sine,	by brave young thegns, kinsmen of Moses,
godfyrhte guman, Iosua ond Tobias.	the God-fearing men Joshua and Tobias.
Nu ðu miht gecnawan þæt þe cyning engla	Now you may understand how the King of Angels
gefrætwode furður mycle	adorned you in ancient days with

	gifts far beyond any
giofum geardagum þonne eall gimma cynn.	He gave to any family of precious stones.
þurh his halige hæs þu scealt hræðe cyðan	By His sacred order you are quickly to show
gif ðu his ondgitan ænige hæbbe.	if you have any understanding of this!

(1495–1521)

In this case, the material stone is glorified as a bearer of the divine commandments and is even compared to other materials, such as gold (*ðu golde eart*). The ubiquity of stone here is contrasted with the precious materials typical of religious practice to paradoxically elevate the mundane by virtue of its serviceability in the divine plan. The address further highlights that stone can also be a witness of time, of historic events and, as such, an admonisher to future readers of the inscription it bears. It is almost as if inscribed stone embodies the cardinal virtue of Prudence, which, having witnessed past, possibly conflictual, events, calls the reader of the inscription to reason and to acknowledge what happened at this very place. This appeal to commemorate the historical personalities or events connected to the stone inscription simultaneously invites its receivers to reconsider their future actions through its function as a memorial. Consequently, since numerous stone inscriptions affect their receivers, they can be seen as ancient influencers of future actions and generations. The creator of a stone inscription anticipates a future communication between the stone, as a bearer of a message significant enough to perpetuate and pass on to others, and potential future readers. The fact that future consumers of the message are influenced means that the inscription is appellative, granting the object agency. Scholars refer to this potential of (particularly man-made) objects to affect the attitudes, actions, and practices of humans as *affordance*.[303]

In order to understand how a stone can affect the humans that interact with it, we need to investigate how stones function as communicative artefacts. The situation of a stone inscription plays an essential role in the communicative act since the heaviness of the material means script-bearing stone artefacts tend to be immobile, manifesting a phenomenon termed *place-bound visibility*.[304] As Laura Velte's chapter on tombs in this volume illustrates, the place-bound visibility of inscribed stone produces an *effect of presence* for the deceased by creating the temporary illusion of suspended limits of life. The substantial presence and place-bound visibility of stone, in particular,

establishes a kind of physical contact with beings from the past. This being the case, stone inscriptions tend to be primarily locostatic, emphasising the connection between the script they bear and their location. For this reason, stone inscriptions often contain deictic words or phrases—expressions that require further contextual information, such as the speaker's and receiver's location—to be fully understood.

Medieval literature offers a number of examples of deictic expressions in stone inscriptions. Narrated epitaphs illustrate spatial deixis,[305] which refers to "the marking of orientation or position in space of the referent of a linguistic expression",[306] using the deictic local adverb *here* / *hic*, as in: *Here lyth swete Blaunchefloure* / *That Florys lovyd par amoure* ("Here lies sweet Blauncheflor, who Florys loved with all his heart", *Floris and Blauncheflor* 209–218); or *Hic situs est typicus aries, duo cornua cuius* / *regit Alexander, totius malleus orbis* ("Here rests in the figure of an Aries, with whose two horns he ruled, Alexander, the hammer of the whole world", Walter of Châtillon, *Alexandreis* 7, 379–7, 430). The deictic demonstrative pronoun *this* (*diz*/*dißem*/*istud*) creates object deixis, as in the religious poem *Von Gottes Zukunft* by Heinrich von Neustadt: *Diz ist dez frides palas* ("This is the palace of peace", 1685–1728). The famous sword in the stone passage, here from the *Prose Merlin*, also features such an inscription:

> *And he redde the letteres that seiden, "Who taketh this swerde out of this ston sholde be kynge by the eleccion of Jhesu Criste". And when he hadde redde this letteres, he seide to the peple what it ment*. (75–80)
>
> And he read the letters that said, "Whoever takes this sword out of this stone shall be king by the election of Jesus Christ". And once he had read these letters he explained to the people what they meant.

Finally, deictic personal pronouns *I* / *me* / *my* create person deixis, as we see in the following inscription on a throne in the verse romance *Der Große Alexander aus der Wernigeroder Handschrift*:

> ***Mir** dient Parthus und India,*
> *Medus, Arabs und Asyrius,*
> *Mesopotann, Persa, Celitus,*
> ***Mir** dient judische diet,*
> *Welhische lant. Den Moren geriet*
> ***Ich** mit maht **mich** nahen,*
> *Macedon, Krichen enfahen*
> *Musten auch zu herren **mich**.*
> (1397, emphasis mine)
>
> Parthus and India,
> Medes, Arabia and Syria,
> Mesopotamia, Persia and Celitus,
> the Jewish people
> and the Roman lands served me.
> I approached the Moors with power,
> the Macedonians and the Greeks also
> had to receive me as Lord.

The inscription on the stone throne lists the lands that owe

Alexander taxes. The significance of the inscription is underlined by its exceptional length: it goes on for 33 verses.

Deictic expressions found in stone inscriptions function to orient both fictional characters and readers. Although spatial and object deixis in stone inscriptions craft a tight connection between the message and the place and the inscribed object, they differ in what they reference. Spatially deictic expressions usually refer to the surrounding location in which the script-bearing stone inscription has been placed. If they refer to a point of reference in their surroundings, it is identifiable for the recipient once he himself is present. The old King Lancelot's grave the Middle High German *Prosalancelot* illustrates this:

> *Under dißem sargk lytt der lichnam konig Lancelots, der konig Bans vatter was von Bonewig, in dem brunnen syn heubt. Der lichnam sol nit ußer der erden genomen werden oder der sargk off gebrochen, biß so lang der best ritter der welt syn hant daran legt*. (II, 524)
>
> Under this coffin lies the corpse of king Lancelot, father of king Ban of Bonewig, in the well his head. The corpse must not be taken out and the coffin must not be opened until the best knight in the world touches it with his hand.

The deictic demonstrative pronoun *dißem* combined with the spatial preposition *under* and the lexeme *sargk* specify the exact extralinguistic point of reference. The demonstrative pronoun reveals the proximity of the object to the inscription. Comparing that to the expression *in dem brunnen*, we note that the point of reference of the well is not as close to the script-bearing artefact as the *coffin*, since the inscription does not apply the demonstrative pronoun, but the definite article. If the inscription said *in dißem brunnen* instead of *in dem brunnen*, it would probably be placed directly on the well. But through the presence of the potential recipient, one can nevertheless clearly identify which well is meant because it is situated proximate to the stone inscription. The character's and reader's identification and location of the objects presented in the narrative help to create a spatial story-world. Consequently, spatial deictic expressions can refer to the script-bearing artefact itself or its immediate surroundings, as well as to objects situated further away. Obviously, they could also refer to objects having disappeared in the course of time, to produce a puzzle or highlight an absence.

Object deixis, typically demonstrative pronouns that refer specifically to an object, are, on the other hand, locally independent, especially if they are self-referential and locomobile, like the inscribed gems in Gahmuret's helmet in

Parzival by Wolfram von Eschenbach*: durch disen helm ein tjoste sluoc* / *den werden der ellen truoc* ("through this helmet a joust has slain / the worthy and brave man, 108,3f.) The examples of self-referential locomobile stone inscriptions are not numerous, which is what makes the example of Gahmuret's helmet all the more exceptional (although this helmet is no longer movable in this arrangement of the tomb). The particularity of gemstones, as a specific type of stone often used for jewellery, is that it is not only possible to inscribe words on them, but also to write with the gemstones themselves by forming letters with them—as we see with the dog leash in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Titurel*.[307] As to their materiality, Cohen points out that unlike "friable stones", "[a] diamond becomes a precious gem because its rarity, lucidity, and density can sustain strong confederation with human and inhuman forces, tools, economic and aesthetic systems".[308] Additionally, the gemstone is a fairly mobile—or *nomadic*, as Cohen puts it—type of stone because of its lighter weight. Its object history is unique since in medieval times it was considered to be a "potential sojourner from a lost age or unreachable terrain, ready to speak its story of temporal and geographical nomadism".[309] When gemstones appear, prepared to speak via their inscriptions, they are, like Gahmuret's helmet exceptionally unique objects.

If most stone inscriptions are self-referential and locostatic, they intrinsically combine the object they are referring to with the place they have been situated and the message they bear, as is the case for tombstones and commemorative columns, for example. This is why spatial and object deixis can be connected, though their specific points of reference are usually not exactly equivalent. This also means that object deixis has clear-cut limits as to a referent (namely the object itself), whereas in spatial deixis the local adverb *here*, for example, is not defined and delimited as precisely as object deixis.[310] Taking another look at the Lancelot example analysed above, we see that in expressions like *under dißem sargk* or *in dem brunnen* spatial deictic words—in this case *under* or *in*—are connected with object deixis like *dißem sargk* or *dem brunnen*. The fact that through the use of deictic expressions even the reader of the literary work can identify the points of reference is proof of the linguistic precision narrated inscriptions exert. In doing so, they play into the hermeneutic circle in the reading process since the reader deduces the surroundings of the fictional world, including distance and proximity of certain objects through deictic expressions, partly combined with lexemes pointing to specific

objects in the narrative world. Consequently, the inscriptions including their deixis are constituting elements of narrative world-making.

Personal deixis in stone inscriptions requires further consideration because it can refer to the addresser, potentially introducing a creator of the inscription. The addresser may also be the object itself, in that the inscription performs "*prosopopoeia* — the rhetorical device through which objects and nonhuman creatures are given speech".[311] An example of a talking object consisting of stone is the entrance gate of the garden of Venus in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* (1381f.):

And over the gate, with lettres large iwroughte,	And over the gate, fashioned with large letters,
There were vers iwriten, as me thoughte,	There were verses written, to my mind,
On eyther half, of ful gret difference,	One either half, of very great difference,
Of which I shal yow seyn the pleyn sentence:	Of which I will tell you the entire message:
"Thorgh me men gon into that blysful place	"Through me men go into that blissful place
Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure;	Of the heart's consolation and deadly wound's cure;
Thorgh me men gon unto the welle of grace,	Through me men go to the well of grace,
There grene and lusty May shal evere endure.	There green and lusty May shall ever endure.
This is the wey to al good aventure.	This is the way to all good adventure.
Be glad, thow redere, and thy sorwe of-caste;	Be glad, thou reader, and cast off thy sorrow;
Al open am I—passe in, and sped thee faste!"	All open am I—pass in, and hurry!"

(124–134)

In this exceptional case of the talking object, deictic personal pronouns are used to refer not only to the object itself but to its functioning and use with the "mysterious speaking voice, arising out of the reflexive relationship between speech and thing" that "comments upon its own material identity".[312] The semantic content alludes to the way this object is used (*Thorgh me men gon*) and the use of prosopopoeia personifies the stone gate. It speaks directly to the recipients of the words written on it, even applying imperatives such as *Be glad* or *passe in*. The personified object then transmits a message that does not change according to its

recipient, but, as Ramey argues, "it 'boldly announces' an errand-speech".[313] It is a message, written on a place-bound object that is important for potential users of the object. In this case, they are informed what kind of men have gone through the gate and what awaits them behind it, which highlights not only the significance of the object, but also the place it is situated.

In the reception of a stone inscription, conventionally characterised by the absence of its creator, the addresser's identity can remain a mystery to the reader. In some cases, it is possible to reconstruct the original communication situation and thereby identify the addresser. On a tombstone, for example, the origin is certainly more obvious than on other stone inscriptions —even though, there are examples, such as the alliterative poem *St Erkenwald* (late fourteenth century), where workers discover a grave with an illegible epitaph written on it.[314] In this case, the fact that the inhabitant of the grave and its creators remain unknown is essential for the fundamental mystery St Erkenwald must solve. As for stone inscriptions that are not written on tombstones, the reader might require some additional knowledge as to the exact circumstances of the artefact's creation, including the intention of the message. The tablets Eve instructs Seth to inscribe in the Middle English *Life of Adam and Eve* (fifteenth century) serve as an example for this:

> *Therefore here thou, my sone Seeth: make thou tweyne tablys, of stoon and of schynyng cley erthe, and wryte there-ynne the lijf of youre fadir and of me, and tho thingis that yee han herd and seen of us. For whanne God schal iuge al oure kynde by water, the tablys of erthe wolen loose, and the tablis of stoon wolen dwelle; forsothe, whanne God wole iuge mankynde by fier, thane wole* [*the tablis of stoon loose, and*] *the tablis of erthe endure*. (97–99)
>
> Therefore hear thou, my son Seth: make thou two tablets, of stone and of shining clay earth, and write therein the life of your father and of me, and those things that you have heard and seen of us. For when God shall judge our kind by water, the tablets of earth will be destroyed, and the tablets of stone will remain; verily, when God will judge humanity by fire, then will the tablets of stone be destroyed and the tablets of earth endure.

First of all, the fact that Eve highlights the properties of the different materials is fairly exceptional. She tells her son to make tablets both of stone and of clay, so no matter how God judges them—by water or by fire—one of the materials would survive.

According to the text the stone tablet would be lost if God judged them by fire. Consequently, the intention behind the creation of this inscription is to perpetuate the story of Adam and Eve and to transmit it to future generations. After Seth finishes the tablets

they are stored in his father's oratory, where they were preserved and only found after the flood. Solomon was the first one to attempt to decipher them: *and he preyede to God that he myghte undirstonde the wrytynge of the tablis* (and he prayed to god that he might understand the writing of the tablets, *Life of Adam and Eve* 97–99). He wants to know what the inscriptions say, but also needs additional information about where they are from and who made them—pieces of information that an angel provides:

> *Then appeeride to hym the aungel of God, seyinge: I am the aungel that helde the hond of Seth whanne he wroot this with an irun, haldynge it in his right hond. And yn these two tablis weren wryten manye wonderful profecyes; and I sey to thee, Salamon, thow shalt knowe the scripture that is wryten in these tablis. And these thablis weren in the place where Adam and Eve weren wonyd to preye to God, therefore it bihoveth thee to make there a dwellynge place to God.' And thane Salamon clepide these lettris on these tablis Achiliacos, that is to seye, with-outen techyng of lyppis wryten with the fyngir of the right hond of Seeth, the aungel of God holdynge it. Thanne made Salamon an hous in the name of God, men to preyen ynne; and in tho tablis was founden wryten that that was profecyed of Adam seven sythis*. (97–99)

> Then appeared to him the angel of God, saying; I am the angel that held the hand of Seth when he wrote this with an iron, holding it in his right hand. And in these two tablets were written many wonderful prophecies; and I say to thee, Solomon, thou shalt know the scripture that is written in these tablets. And these tablets were in the place where Adam and Eve were accustomed to pray to God, and therefore it is fitting for you to make a dwelling place for God there. And then Solomon called these letters on the tablets, Achiliacos, that is to say, without teaching of lips, written with the finger of the right hand of Seth, the angel of God holding it. Then Solomon made a house in the name of God, for men to pray in; and in those tablets was found written that which was prophesied by Adam seven times.

The uniqueness of the example of *Life of Adam and Eve* is that it focuses not only on the way the inscriptions on the tablets are created, but also on the reasons why they chose the materials, the state of the tablets after time has passed and the willingness of potential and actual recipients to understand what they communicate, including a witness offering information on how the inscriptions came to be. All these factors play into the communication created by the inscription, both on the sending and on the receiving end. In this sense, stone inscriptions are elegant examples of Ehlich's concept of a divided communication in texts, where the process of *speaking* is separated from the process of *hearing*. The speaker, thus, creates a potential communication situation; the hearer, on the other hand, has to decipher it by reading it and considering the intention behind the message.[315] To do that with stone inscriptions, the hearer has to consider not only the speaker's possible intentions, but also the

object that is written on and the place that it has been situated. Stone inscriptions confront the potential readers with enigmatic pieces of information and deictic expressions play a crucial role in this regard.

In the example of Iphis' and Araxarathen's epitaph in *Confessio Amantis* by John Gower (1390), we can see that personal deictic expressions in tombstones additionally have the particularity of a non-determined addressee that can vary depending on the respective onlooker.

And for men schal the sothe wite,	And so that men shall know the truth,
Thei have here epitaphe write,	They have written an epitaph here,
As thing which scholde abide stable.	As a thing which should abide permanently.
The lettres graven in a table	The letters were engraved in a table
Of marbre were and seiden this:	of marble and said this:
"Hier lith, which slowh himself, Iphis,	"Here lies Iphis, who slew himself,
For love of Araxarathen:	For love of Araxarathen:
And in ensample of tho wommen,	And as example of those women
That soffren men to deie so,	That suffer men to die in this manner,
Hire forme a man mai sen also,	Her form a man may see also,
Hou it is torned fleissh and bon	How it is turned[,] flesh and bone[,]
Into the figure of a ston.	Into the figure of a stone.
He was to neysshe and sche to hard.	He was too soft and she too hard.
Be war forthi hierafterward;	Be mindful therefore hereafter;
Ye men and wommen bothe tuo,	Ye men and women [both of you],
Ensampleth you of that was tho".	Take heed of what happened".
(4, 3652–3684.)	

Here, too, the pragma-semantic content of the stone inscription needs to be reconstructed and deciphered by the recipient, leading to a certain enigmatic element. It is not only created through the use of spatial deictic expressions, such as *hier*, referring to Iphis' and Araxarathen's grave, but also personal deictic elements, such as *Ye men and women* and *you*, and, most notably, the explicit address to and direct request of potential readers in the form of two imperatives, *Be war* and *Ensampleth*. If, like in this case, stone inscriptions speak directly to potential readers, they will create unique communications, since the reader will be a different one in each instance. Further, it remains unclear whether the reader will adhere to the inscription since the addressee can either decide to act in accordance with the given instructions or against them.

Remarkably, the rhyme scheme of the inscription, which consists of rhyming couplets, is an intrinsic part of the narration since the narrative frame announcing the content of the inscription (ending on *seiden this*) rhymes with the first line of the inscription *himself, Iphis*. Lines between narrative frame and

narrated inscription are blurred; there is no clear separation. Poetry and inscriptions are closely connected in this passage

> as similar forms of practice. Writing poetry equals making an inscription, a more powerful practice than writing on paper because it is the expression of one sovereign voice permanently speaking; there is no equivalent answer to an inscription, effective because it is both monophonic and material.[316]

The example from *Confessio Amantis* shows us that stone inscriptions do not have to be either informative-descriptive or appellative-prescriptive; they can, indeed, be both. Additionally, even though tomb inscriptions are fairly common in medieval literature, stone inscriptions can be found on other objects, or simply rocks, as well. In the alliterative poem *Bernardus de cura famuliaris*, Thomas à Becket (Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162 until 1170) discovers, during his exilic travels in southern France, the foundation of a tower whose construction has not been finished.[317] He is told that the workers had discovered a stone inscription containing a threatening message:

Thai fand A fayr letter on A stone fast,	They found a fair letter inscribed in a stone
That it wonderrede all the workmen that	That it amazed all the workmen that [worked on
the werk wroght,	the tower],
It sayd, "masterles men, yhe this tour make,	It said, "Masterless men, ye [who] this tower make,
A Bayre sall come out of Berttane wyth so	A Boar shall come out of Britain with so broad
brode tuskis,	tusks,
He shall travyll up yhour towre, and your	And he shall assault your tower, and your town
town ther efter,	thereafter,
And dycht his den in the derrest place that	And dig his den in the dearest place that King
ever aucht kynge charles".	Charles ever possessed".

(47–52)

The portentous inscription causes the workers to stop their work in fear. The text continues: *This foulkes had ferly theroff, and the freke fechede* ("these men were amazed by it and fetched the great man", 53). The workers therefore act in accordance with the inscribed prophecy. The inscription speaks directly to its targeted readers, namely the workers, calling them *masterles men*. Through spatial proximity and the use of the possessive pronouns, it is clear which tower and town is meant. There is one more particularity, though, that stands out, which is the use of the future auxiliary *shall* (including its variant *sall*). The use of this

verb in this context is, without doubt, a temporally deictic expression with future reference and prophetic function. Therefore, the category of *temporal deixis* completes the above list of different types of deictic expressions. It refers to "the orientation or position of the referent of actions and events in time [...] [and] can be marked through tense, encoded on the verb with affixes, or expressed in an independent morpheme".[318] It is surprising and somewhat paradoxical, though, that the perpetual function of stone inscriptions can be reversed by temporal deixis since it nullifies its eternal validity once the announced event has come true. In this case, we actually have textual evidence that stone is not always the most durable material to carry an inscription since the text says that Thomas à Becket *kest the stone in the watter, & bad it waa worche* ("he cast the stone in the water and bade its waves [do their] work", 55).

The tombstones in Chrétien's *Lancelot ou Le chevalier de la charrete* that foretell the graves of Gaurains, Looys and Yrains, similarly, use temporal deixis in stone inscriptions as a form of menace and obscure prophecy.

Li chevaliers aprés le moinne	The knight enters the cemetery after the monk
Antre et voit les plus beles tonbes	and sees the most beautiful graves
Qu'an poïst trover jusqu'a Donbes	that they could find until the Dombes
Ne de la jusq'a Panpelune.	and from there to Pamplona,
Et s'avoit letres sor chascune,	and on every single one there were letters
Qui les nons de ceus devisoient	that formed the names of those
Qui dedanz les tonbes girroient.	that would be in the graves.
Et il meïsmes tire a tire	And he began, one after the other,
Comança les letres a lire,	to read the letters
Et trova: Ci girra Gauvains,	and he found: Here will rest Gauvain,
Ci Looys et ci Yvains.	Here Looys and here Yvain.

(1868–1874).

Once these characters are actually dead, the tombstones will lose their significance due to the future tense of the verb *girra*. In literature, though, and especially in the narrative moments the future irrelevance of such stone inscriptions seems to be bracketed. The function of admonisher and deliverer of a threat is much more significant at that specific narrative point than their possible outdated existence in the future of the narrative frame. But bearing this in mind, the endurance of stone inscriptions including future dates, simultaneously imply that at one time in the future they lose their original function, temporal significance and use.

In conclusion, stone inscriptions tend to be characterised by a

combination of resistant material, heightened immobility due to its weight and linguistic content, including significant deictic references. Stone presents an enigma to the potential reader which needs to be solved so not just the past but the future can be understood. The ancient influencer has a historic message to deliver and wants the reader to take action.

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From Tattoo to Stigma: Writing on Body and Skin

1Premedieval Bodies and Ancient Otherness

This publication originated in the Collaborative Research Centre 933 “Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies” (subproject C05 “Inscriptionality. Reflections of Material Text Culture in the Literature of the 12th to 17th Centuries” and subproject C09 “Inscription of the Body: Text and Body in Pre-modern Iberian Literature”). The CRC 933 is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

Human skin has always been an immediately evident and readily available medium to which marks and signs can be applied. For instance, 61 tattoos have been identified on the body of “the iceman” Ötzi, the more than five thousand year old mummy found in the Alps in 1991 on a glacier at the Austrian-Italian border.[319] Crosses and parallel lines forming patterns on his skin are now distinguishable via new photographic techniques; but their significance is lost to us. With no textual source to help us explain the mysterious meaning of these tattoos, it is hard to decide whether they were made for aesthetic, therapeutic or religious reasons (or some combination thereof, as in the case of magical practices).[320] And yet these age-old lines and crosses on Ötzi’s skin may help to challenge our common understanding of script and writing as a system of significant signs identified primarily to encode speech and language. As far as bodies and skin are concerned, we have to develop a broader perspective, taking into account various forms of corporeal marking. Ötzi’s tattoos may be considered as a corporeal “proto-script”, marking the body, making it readable and extending its natural expressive potential. Although these signs may not be alphabetical characters, they are an extraordinary form of writing that transforms the human body into a text demanding to be read. After all, living human bodies and their surfaces provide a very special material, worthy of exceptional practices and discourses.

Historically, it is difficult to estimate the cultural significance and scope of tattoos and similar types of corporeal inscriptions. Since archaeological remnants are subject to decay, almost

everything we know about marks and writing on skin stems from written records, sources that are also sparse and not always unequivocal. One main difficulty lies in the vocabulary. The word "tattoo" denoting the insertion of pigments into the skin, for example, came into the English language (and to other languages as well) by way of colonialism: James Cook introduced the Polynesian word for "to mark" after observing this practice in Tahiti. The Greek term *stigmata* is much older. It refers to corporeal marking in Latin texts and it creates a direct link between the phenomenon in antique cultures and the Christian imaginary, even as the cultural significance of the practices varied over time.[321]

As a specific body-script, corporeal inscriptions may be used to write, often by force, social relations and hierarchies upon the very flesh of men and women; or they might enable someone to fashion his or her own body, following a script of individual identity or showing affiliation towards a certain group. Earliest written accounts originate from antique Mediterranean civilizations; although these records attribute markings on human bodies regularly either to foreign "barbarians" or deviant persons. Tattooing practices are mentioned for the whole Northern African space—an outstanding example are the Thracians—as well as the Western Balkan Peninsula.[322] While Germanic tribes presumably did not practice permanent tattooing, they used corporal painting as an analogous bodily marking practice (if Latin historiography and ethnography are to be trusted).[323] In order to distinguish themselves from such cultures, the Mediterranean "high cultures" reject the practice for themselves, construing the tattoo as a mark of social difference and, especially, subordination. Greeks and Romans used tattooing or branding to permanently stigmatise the bodies of criminals and slaves in the form of punitive marks.[324] The principle behind this attribution is pretty much clear: while one's own body remains unsullied, the skin of others may be marked and stained. Old Testament prohibitions against any cuttings and printed marks (except for circumcision) suggest a similar stance in Jewish culture.[325]

It seems as if these antique practices of marking the body were mostly forgotten during the Middle Ages. If there were tattoos in significant numbers, they would have been "circulating most actively on the margins", as Jane Caplan notes: "The tattoo has been a promiscuously travelling sign in Western culture, moving literally on the homeless bodies of the slaves, criminals, pilgrims, sailors, soldiers […]".[326] Early Christians may have adapted these

marks of deviance to signal their affiliation with the new religion, writing "J. N." (*Jesus Nazarenus*) or the letter *tau* "τ" (because of its resemblance to the cross) on their arms or palms. In doing so, they constituted themselves as an excluded and disdained community, re-semanticising and subverting the corporeal signs of slavery, "appropriating the identity of slave or criminal in such a way as to translate the humiliating mark of political subjugation into an inscription of divine election".[327] In a similar way, pilgrims and crusaders may have acquired tattoos and brandings in the Holy Land, thereby expressing the desire for a visible and somatically experienceable distinction.[328]

We find this deliberate "marking" of Christian difference in the context of medieval *imitatio Christi*, when believers receive stigmata, experiencing the wounds inflicted on Christ's body during the crucifixion on their own bodies. Although stigmata are, like Ötzi's tattoos, strictly speaking neither writing nor alphabetic script, they are nonetheless distinctive, readable, and profoundly socially significant. However, in contrast to Ötzi's tattoos, which we can view for ourselves, medieval religious stigmata are only documented in textual accounts. Yet, regardless of whether reported stigmata were real or not, they represent an important and widely circulating discourse, crucially influencing the medieval image of corporeal signs and bodily marks.

This chapter shall explore medieval examples of script-bearing bodies in two sections: first we briefly consider instances of magical runes applied to and incorporated into bodies in Old Norse poetry before exploring in more detail Christian negotiations of the body as a medium in (auto-)biographies of saints and in mystical texts. Starting with stigmata, modelled on Jesus Christ, we follow the transition from externally applied marks to self-inflicted—"auto-poietic"—corporeal writing. We will then take a quick glance at secular literature, such as the accounts of *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Dante's *Divina Commedia* and the early modern *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*. These texts clearly show a connection to religious contexts but often extend their expressive potential by developing a dynamic bodily performance, closely linked to the respective storyline.

2Runic Magic and Christian Stigmata

Old Norse poetry represents an intriguing and extraordinary culture of corporeal writing. Since magical powers are often ascribed to runic letters, they are able to affect not only things but

also human bodies. *Sigrdrífumál* ("Sigrdrifa's speech"), which is part of the *Poetic Edda* (written down in the thirteenth century), offers a significant example of the corporeal potential of runes. Odin, the Germanic god of wisdom, sorcery, poetry and the runes, puts the Valkyrie Sigrdrifa to sleep, using a rune written on her body as sleeping spell. Sigurd, who finds the sleeping Valkyrie and awakens her, asks her to teach him wisdom. She hands him a drinking-horn with mead, and then explains the force and effectiveness of runes:[329]

Qlrúnar scaltu kunna, ef þú vill,	Ale-runes you will want, if another
annars	man's wife
qvæn	
vélit þic í trygð, ef þú trúir;	tries to betray your trust;
á horni scal þær rísta oc á handar baki	scratch them on your drinking-horn, the back of
	your hand
oc merkia á nagli Nauð.	and the "need" rune on your nail.
Full scal signa oc við fári siá	With this sign your horn can never harm you;
oc verpa lauki í lǫg:	dip a leek in your drink;
þá ec þat veit, at þér verðr aldri	then I know you will never find
meinblandinn miǫðr	death mixed into your mead.
(Edda 1962, 191)	(Poems of the Elder Edda 1990, 8–9)

This advice is for when one is offered a welcoming drink as a guest.[330] "Need" (*Nauð*), the n-rune, which is supposed to be applied to a fingernail and the back of one's hand, seems to have magical qualities. Although the writing of runes is just one of the actions described, it establishes a connection between the marked vessel, the marked person, and the power of runic writing. As we can see, runes and script possess power that goes far beyond the preservation and transmission of messages.

Magical practices involving corporeal writing, such as those used in mystical or occult healing, can take the form of writing applied to the body's surface, as well as the literal incorporation of text. Script-bearing amulets were not only attached to the body; biblical verses, dissolved in water, could also be ingested.[331] The magical treatise MS. e Mus. 219 (late thirteenth century) from Oxford's Bodleian Library, for example, indicate a cure for men seized by a demon:

> you should take a piece of parchment and write on it the sign of the cross and the opening of the gospel according to John. Then you should scrape the words off the parchment into a bowl, and give these scrapings to the afflicted person to drink, along with holy water.[332]

While in *Sigrdrífumál* the reiteration of the rune guarantees the

fusion of body and text, in the case of the magical treatise the fusion is achieved via the digestion of Holy Scripture. In both cases, however, there are additional effects produced by this amalgamation of text and body: protection against danger and poison in one case; exorcism of a demon in the other. These combinations of a corporeal sign with the ingestion of a script-containing magic beverage in a vessel also show some similarities with the Christian Eucharist.[333]

Unlike these accounts of concrete practices that apply script to the human body, other texts offer more imaginative scenes of corporeal writing that lend themselves to metafictional readings. In those narrations, the boundaries are often blurred between corporeal script as a physical phenomenon and its metaphorical use as a "topos". These narrative texts can benefit from the two complementary modes of transformation which Michel de Certeau has identified with regard to the corporeality of writing: *intextuation* (transforming body into text) and *encarnation* (transforming text into body).[334] Mystical narratives thus feature a constant interplay, transforming bodies into texts and texts into bodies. Hence we see medieval texts reconfiguring the foundational Bible verses from the Revelation of St John and the *Cantus cantorum* deploying a range of possibilities to articulate the contact with God in terms of an inscription on the body.[335] *Pone me ut signaculum super cor tuum, ut signaculum super brachium tuum*—Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm—indicates *Cantus cantorum* 8:6, referring to both an external, visible marking on the skin and an interior, more intimate heart-inscription. The testimonial character of visible skin-writings (as stigmata) and the mystery of the hidden marks of sanctity within the heart are the two vectors of medieval hagiographic interest. Both are readable as a form of *imitatio Christi*.

The "scar-writing" (*Narbenschrift*)[336] of stigmata makes the saint's body a medium of divine communication and makes readable a (lost) divine autograph.[337] The marks of the crucifixion born by Saint Francis, the first recorded stigmatic in the early thirteenth century, allow him to imitate Christ—and many more will follow Francis's example in the centuries to come. In hagiographic accounts, the saints re-perform and remember the passion with the help of corporeal writing. The textual enactment of those stigmata is clearly expressed, for example, in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum* (c. 1220). In this reflection about the suffering skin as a parchment and Christ's body as an open book that enables a direct, non-mediated reading of the

Scripture, Caesarius equates the scars with written signs:[338]

> *In pelle siquidem corporis eius scriptae erant litterae minores et nigrae, per lividas plagas flagellorum; litterae rubeae et capitales, per infixiones clavorum; puncta etiam et virgulae, per punctiones spinarum. Bene pellis eadem prius fuerat multiplici percussione pumicata, colaphis et sputis cretata, arundine liniata.*
>
> The small and black letters were written by the bruising blows of the scourge on the parchment of his body; the red letters and capitals by the piercing of the nails; and the full stops and commas by the pricking of the thorns. Well had that parchment already been polished with a multitude of beatings, whitened by blows and spit, and erased with the reed.[339]

Like a manuscript, the body becomes a textual document, proving the veracity of its message of redemption. And through the meditative lecture, the divine body becomes a "script" to imitate.

The Middle English *Charters of Christ* (c. 1350) also belong to this Franciscan tradition. These narrative poems are concerned with Christ's crucifixion, transforming the material components into a legal transaction: "Christ's skin is the parchment, the wounds, its letters, the blood, the sealing wax, and the Eucharist, that section of the charter left for safekeeping in the hands of those striking the legal transaction".[340] By commingling practices linked to chancelleries and charters with the human body as medium of the written word, these texts can also remind us that medieval readers and writers were used to seeing and touching inscribed skin that very much resembled their own, marked "with pores, veins, cuffs, or scars".[341]

In the *Charters of Christ*, the "incarnation" of the biblical passion goes hand in hand with a poetic *intextuation* of the body. Jesus Christ, as first person narrator, presents his tormented body as a written document:

And so y suffred all þe nyȝt	And so I suffered all the night
Tyll on morn hit was day-lyȝt	Until in the morning it was daylight
Streyned well harde to a tre	Stretched firmly on a tree
As parchemyn oweth for to be	As a parchment ought to be.
Herkeneth now & ȝe shall wyten	Listen now and ye shall learn
How þe chartur was wryten	How the charter was written
Ouer all my face fyll þe ynke	Over all my face fell the ink
With þornus þat in my hedde gonne synke	The result of thorns that in my head were sunk
The pennus þat þose letterus wryten	The pens that wrote those letters
Wer skourges þat y was with smyten	Were scourges with which I was struck
How many letterus þat þer-on bene	How many letters that thereon be
Rede & þou may wyte & sene	Read and you may know and see
ffyue þowsande fyue hundered þen	Five thousand five hundred ten
Wonþus of my body rede & wanne	Wounds on my body red and

	discoloured
ffor to shew þe of my loue-dede	So as bestow on thee my love-deed
My-self wyll here þe chartur rede	Myself will here the charter read
“O vos omnes qui transitis per viam attendite	“O all you who walk by on the road, pay attention
uidete si est dolor sitis sicut dolor meus”	and see if there be any sorrow like my sorrow.”
ȝe men þat gon her by þe way	Ye men that go here by the way
Beholde & se both nyȝt & day	Behold and see both night and day
And redeth vpon þis parchmyn	And read upon this parchment
ȝyf any sorow be so gret as myn	If any sorrow be so great as mine
Stonþeth & herkeneth þis chartur redde	Stand and listen to this charter being read
Why y am wounded & all forbledde	Why I am wounded and covered in blood.

(155–175)[342]

As in Caesarius’s text, the corporeal writing of the wounds is carved as *letterus* on a *parchemyn* by scourges figuring as a *pennus*.[343] The document of the *chartur* becomes readable for the faithful (*redeth vpon þis parchmyn*), guiding them to knowledge (*wyten*) that slips in a sort of auto-documented *credo*. The very voice of the saviour (*my-self*) confirms this poetic *credo* as an embodied auto-poiesis, and gives an undeniable authority to the anonymous poem. As Annette Kehnel has pointed out, this distinctive perception of corporeality goes along with a cultural transformation “in which justice was increasingly centred on the written record and […] royal bureaucracy”.[344]

We find a similar tendency in vernacular chronicles where the *imitatio Christi* model can be adapted to legitimise royal authority. In the Portuguese *Crónica de Portugal* (1419), the recently crowned King Afonso Henriques, confronted with a papal legate doubting his legitimacy, challenges the papal written document by showing his wounds and opening up his naked body like an open book:[345]

> *[A]mtes que o cardeal partise, desvestyo el-rey sua capa pele e amostrou-lhe muytos synais de feridas que tinha no corpo e dise: “Cardeal, em como eu sam irege bem se mostra nestes synais destas feridas, as quaes eu ouve com os mouros em tal lide e estas em tal e estas no combate de tal vila que lhe filhey e estas outras em tal, e todo isto em serviço de Deos”*. (31)
>
> Before the Cardinal left, he took off his leather coat and showed him many signs of wounds he had on his body, and said: “Cardinal, what kind of heretic I am, is clearly shown by these wounds, which I got in this battle against the Moors, and those in that other, and these here in the battle in this town and those others in this one, and all this in the service of God.”

When it comes to the textual play between *intextuation* and

encarnation, feminine hagiography in particular articulates this double coded "alternative" writing as an opportunity to perform female legitimacy.[346] Within the patriarchal medieval society, the female body can be considered as a white page etched with social hegemonies. A male textual production "writes" the saints' bodies and overwrites their own voices.[347] In hagiographic accounts like Gregory of Nyssa's *Vita sanctae Macrinae* the textual construction of the female saint by the male biographer is in constant competition with a second, more direct form of corporeal writing: the divine stigmatic inscription on the very flesh of the saint. The narrator both refers to and competes with the corporeal inscription.

Not coincidentally, the female voice in the text, if present, defends her invisible or inner corporeal marks as an immediate proof of her elected condition, against the marks of social stigmatisation left on her virginal body by human oppressors. In the anonymous *Liflad ant te passiun of Seinte Margarete* (thirteenth century) from the Middle English *Katherine Group* Margaret's voice insists on the legitimacy of her invisible "seals" and "marks", while her male oppressor Olibrius "fantasizes about overwriting Christ's marks with his own bloody, visible marks and thereby claiming possession of her".[348] The text presents a dramatic negotiation between two corporeal incisions, one invisible and redeeming, the other one blood-red. Margaret speaks:

> *"Ich wulle bitechen mi bodi to eaver- euich bitternesse thet tu const on bithenchen, ne bite hit ne se sare with thon thet Ich mote meidene mede habben in Heovene. Drihtin deide for us, the deorwurthe Lauerd, ant ne drede Ich na deth forto drehen for Him. He haveth His merke on me iseiled with His in-seil; ne mei unc lif ne deth nother twemen otwa." "Na?" quoth he, "Is hit swa? Neometh hire swithe," quoth he to his cwelleres. "Strupeth hire steort-naket* [...] *ant beteth hire bere bodi with bittere besmen." Tha awariede werlahen leiden se lutherliche on hire leofli che lich thet hit brec overal ant litherede o blode.*
>
> "I will commit my body to every cruelty that you can contrive, and may it bite never so sorely provided that I may as a maiden have my reward in Heaven. The Ruler died for us, the dear Lord, and I am not afraid to endure death for Him. He has sealed His mark upon me with His seal, and neither life nor death can divide us in two." "No?" said he. "Is it so? Seize her at once!" said he to his executioners. "Strip her stark-naked [...] and beat her bare body with cruel rods." Then the accursed scoundrels laid so miserably on her lovely body that it burst forth overall and was lathered in blood.

These two modes of marking—the inner/stigmatic and the exterior/societal—suggest, as Virginia Burrus observes, that "hagiography itself [...] emerges as a kind of tattooing".[349]

This tendency is reinforced in texts written by female actors themselves. The late medieval nun Teresa de Cartagena, first female mystic in Castilian Spain,[350] insists in her first-person narration on the same topical claim of bearing an invisible divine inscription as a seal on her body. In her autobiography she describes her body as performing an *imitatio Christi* and bearing His autograph as a scarring mark:

> *Me hirió con su poderosa mano, e* [...] *seguí al Salvador* [...] *corriendo el olor de los enguentos suyos que son sus preciosas llagas, de las quales Él, por su grant caridad, quiso ser vngido e quiere vngir a los que pa*[*ra*] *sy escoje*. (137)
>
> He hurt me with his powerful hand and [...] I followed the Saviour [...] running after the smell of his ointment which are his precious wounds, from which He, for his great mercy, wanted to be anointed and wants to anoint those who he chooses for him.

The narrative text, her secondary written document, allows the primary marks to become legible to others (*manifestar a los que saberlo quisyeren aquello que en mí manifiesto pareçe*, 38f.). The autobiographical writing thus stages an alternative scriptural performance both of and upon the female self, as a "form of self-intervention and self-control over bodies that are often felt to be at the mercy of powers and forces".[351]

This self-performance by means of doubled writing, on the body and in the text, plays with a metaphorical dimension and addresses the legibility of corporeal marks. The heart-inscription is a liminal case for bodily inscription, as it unfolds the hidden interiority of the self, opening it to the gaze of the reader. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians establishes the book of the heart as a literary trope already for early Christianity: "[You] are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men [...] written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:2f.).[352] The success of this trope is impressive, as Eric Jager explains:

> For example, romances tell of lovers' hearts inscribed with signs of the beloved, and saints' legends celebrate martyrs whose hearts received marks of special divine favor. Clergy are instructed to let their inner scribe copy God's commands onto the pages of their hearts, and ordinary believers pray for Christ to write the memory of his Passion in their 'heart books'.[353]

However, not every inscription written "in fleshy tables of the heart" is a metaphorical one. For instance, the *Legenda Aurea* recounts the martyrdom of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, who claims in front of his executioners to have the name of Christ written on his heart: "After his death those who had heard him say this were

driven by curiosity to find out if it was true, so they took the heart out of his body, split it down the middle, and found there the name *Jesus Christ* inscribed in gold letters".[354] Human curiosity, searching for tangible "truth", unveils the mystery of the mystic union and delivers the intimate inscription.[355] The allegory becomes material substance.[356]

Mystics, such as the female actors of hagiographic testimonials, play with this materialisation for a poetic staging of their own performances of holiness. In such a performance, the passive attitude towards a divine inscription switches to an active *écriture de soi* implying a textual constitution of the subject.[357] Heinrich Seuse, a fourteenth-century German mystic, recounts a certain moment in his autobiographical *Vita* when he, inflamed with divine love, grabs his stylus and carves the letters *IHS* into his chest, right over his heart, as an eternal sign of love.[358] In chapter XIV, *Wie er den minneklichen Namen Jesus uf sin Herz zeichnete*,[359] between two scenes of prayer, the protagonist gives material form to his wish for an eternal union with God:

> *"ach, zarter got, wan könd ich etwas minnezeichens erdenken, daz ein ewiges minne zeichen weri enzwischan mir und dir ze einem urkúnde, daz ich din und du mins herzen ewigú minne bist, daz kein vergessen niemer me verdilgen möhti!* [...] *nu gib mir hút kraft und macht ze volbringen min begirde, wan du muost hút in den grund mins herzen gesmelzet werden." Und vie an und stach dar mit dem grifel in daz flaisch ob dem herzen die richti, und stach also hin und her und uf und ab, unz er den namen IHS eben uf sin herz gezeichent*. [...] *Do er dis getet, do gie er also verserte und bluotige uss der cell uf die cancell under daz crucifixus und knúwet nider und sprach: "eya, herr mine und mins herzen einigú minne, nu luog an mins herzen grossen begirde! Herr, ich enkan noch enmag dich nit fúrbaz in mich gedruken; owe herr, ich bite dich, daz du es volbringest und daz du dich nu fúrbaz in den grund mins herzen drukest und dinen heiligen namen in mich also zeichnest, daz du uss minem herzen niemer me gescheidest."* (15f.)

> "oh, gentle god, if I could devise a token of love to be an eternal token of love between me and you, as a charter, documenting me to be yours and you to be my heart's eternal love, never to be erased by oblivion. [...] Now, grant me strength today and power to accomplish my desire because today you are going to be melted into the bottom of my heart." And he began and pierced there with the stylus into the flesh right above the heart and incised back and forth and up and down until he had drawn the name IHS on his heart. [...] When he had done this, he went, thus injured and bleeding, out of the cell up to the pulpit beneath the crucifix and kneeled and said: "Alas, my lord and my heart's only love, look now at my heart's great desire! Lord, I am not able to—and I know not how to imprint you deeper into myself; oh lord, I pray you to finish it and to imprint yourself deeper into the bottom of my heart, incising your holy name into me, so that you will never ever be removed from my heart."

Making the mystical allegories "reality", the protagonist attempts

to force the divine will by enacting the unifying incision upon his own chest. Thus, driven by his own *begirde* (desire) he claims to open up a mutual contract.[360] Compared to Ignatius's or Clara de Montefalco's heart-writing, it is significant that Seuse's sealed document aims to "possess" divine favour through his own action (*daz ich din und du mins herzen ewigú minne bist*). Seuse himself admits the impossibility of forcing this grace, and perceives the supplementarity of his gesture (*Herr, ich enkan noch enmag dich nit fúrbaz in mich gedruken*). Human writing is, once again, a simulacrum of the authentic divine writing. But it is no coincidence that the object of self-mortification is the stylus. It is the process of writing, doubled in the corporeal incision, which tortures and challenges the protagonist. Seuse's dramatic attempt at auto-sanctification through self-inscription fails; nevertheless, his secondary act of writing, his autobiographic text, supplements that corporeal auto-graphy to constitute a self-conscious writing subject with greater agency.

3Empowering Marks and Dynamic Letters

This "auto-poietic" aspect of bodily inscription is also constitutive for the hero's performance in secular narrative texts.[361] What has been, in hagiographic accounts, an eternal mark of the union with God, can now become a dynamic factor of self-articulation. When Gregorius of Nyssa overwrites Macrina's saintly body, or when Seuse mutilates his own body, the writing on and over human skin deals with power relations. Seuse, taking matters into his own hands, empowers himself in the face of an unobtainable divine instance. This empowering gesture is even more drastic when imposed on others, as we have seen in the historical tattoo practices of antiquity. Epic poetry then brings together the aspect of cultural and social stigmatisation (slavery, for example) with the self-conscious gesture of a subject using writing to signify personal agency.

One striking example is the scene in the Middle English romance *Richard Coer de Lyon*. When King Richard has the heads of his Saracen prisoners of war cooked, he inscribes their skulls with their names and lineages.[362] Marking the dead soldiers, the English fix their power on their enemies' bodies. Furthermore, in the context of the broader plot, this desecration is clearly part of a larger pattern of taboo behaviour, particularly cannibalism. Similar to the cannibalism, the inscription appears in *Richard Coer de Lyon* both as a motif of transgression and as a radical

appropriation strategy. As in Eucharistic mysticism, ingestion and inscription are interrelated in this battle for supremacy. The breaking of a taboo by writing on a human skull is integrated in an account of the genesis of a King in the context of cultural confrontation. As a step in Richard's vital course, the breaking of taboo and the use of corporeal inscription are complementary modes in the affirmation of the heroic subject. This epic account seems to prefigure also the configuration of a "wild subject" in narratives of the first colonial contacts in the Americas, or, indeed of the Pacific Islanders whose inscriptional practices gave us the word "tattoo".[363] There we find again the combination of Othering and becoming other, inscribing one's own logics on the very bodies of the others and, at the same time, adopting a "cannibalistic logic", i. e. ingesting their bodies while using writing for the process of acculturation.[364]

The empowerment writing offers, as we have seen in both sacred and profane texts, goes along with the formation of a coherent narrative, forging a hero's personality and qualities. Legible or hidden inscriptions on the body of the hero accompany the hero's development, and figure as guiding threads for the reader. This can be, as in Seuse, a self-inflicted incision, or on the contrary, an event which overcomes the hero and forges his course. In both instances the narrative constitution of the hero depends on the dynamism of the corporeal writing, a principle Dante elegantly illustrates. In the *Divina Commedia* (c. 1320), the protagonist Dante passes through the imaginary spaces of the Christian afterlife, which materialise abstract religious knowledge. In *Purgatorio*, half way to purification, the guardian angel accompanying Dante inscribes seven Ps (for *Peccata*, sins) on his forehead, requiring him to remove them step by step during his journey:

Sette P nella fronte mi descrisse *col punton della spada, e „Fa che lavi,* *quando se' dentro, queste piaghe"* *disse.* (IX, 112–114)	Seven P's he inscribed upon my forehead with the point of his sword, and "See that thou wash these wounds when thou art within," he said.

The corporeal inscription is a visible mark of his inner sinful condition. Like the biblical mark of Cain, the *Peccata*-sign literally subjects the protagonist to God's master plan. But these signs are removable; they reflect the protagonist's state of mind, a condition which is supposed to evolve as the narrative progresses. The inscriptions thereby make the narrative program of the text legible to the reader on the very body of the hero, a program that is fixed beforehand: *"Quando i P che son rimasi* /

ancor nel volto tuo presso che stinti, / saranno, come l'un del tutto rasi" ("When the P's which, almost extinct, still remain on thy forehead shall be, as one is, quite erased", XII, 121–123).

As the text is written in first person, the reader experiences this progressive inscription as a corporeal phenomenon with Dante the narrator. The erasure of the signs is represented somatically, as the touch of a cool wind from the passing of wings, the scent of ambrosia, an easing of the body's painful heaviness:

tal mi senti' un vento dar per mezza *la fronte, e ben senti' mover la piuma,* *che fe' sentir d'ambrosia l'orezza.* (XXIV, 148–150)	such a wind I felt strike upon the middle of my forehead, and I clearly felt the motion of the plumage, which made me perceive the odor of ambrosia.

In this somatic narration, corporeal writing is an ephemeral phenomenon, closely linked to the dynamics of the narration itself. The process of inscription, or, in this case, of the erasure of writing, forges a narrative character, and empowers a subject to articulate his dynamic self-constitution. In Dante's text, human agency is in play against the divine master plan.

To conclude, let us examine one last example at the crossroads between Dante's divine purification and Seuse's self-empowerment. The first account of the Faust legend, *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* (1587), also shows corporeal writing as a temporary and dynamic phenomenon in the context of a dramatic power struggle. After some discussion with the devil Mephostophiles, Faust picks up a pointed knife and punctures a vein in his left hand to sign a diabolical contract in his own blood. As this happens, the narrator interjects and states that one could allegedly see engraved (*ein gegrabne*) in Faust's hand bloody letters saying *O Homo fuge* ("oh man, flee", 854). In this story about a necromancer who makes a deal with the devil, this is the only occasion where God directly intervenes. This intervention is, in terms of its content, addressed to humanity as a whole; and in terms of its material addressed directly to the protagonist—but to no avail. God's message, this attempt to seek contact and to warn, misses the addressee. Faust chooses his own bloody writing instead of the divine incision, privileging—like Seuse—his own expressive agency. The letters of the divine inscription are no longer (as in mystical stigmata) a stable affair but an ephemeral narrative effect, and no longer guide the protagonist's course (as they did Dante). In this early modern account of mortal overweening, the human has definitively appropriated the power of writing.

As ancient witnesses like Ötzi demonstrate, one of the notable

features of corporeal inscriptions is their physical permanence (even if the skin itself does not easily withstand the ravages of time). This makes the imagined exceptions, when script on the skin is treated as a temporary phenomenon, all the more fascinating. As we have seen, fictional accounts of corporeal writing and tattooing are easier to grasp against the backdrop of cultural practices and historical contexts, but their imaginative potential goes much further. Unlike in Ötzi's case, the accessibility of these corporeal inscriptions is not simply an issue of cultural transparency. We must also work to comprehend the inner narrative strategies and aesthetic dimensions of the phenomenon which help to enact the complex relationship between humanity, our corporeality and the problem of writing itself.

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Woven Words, Embroidered Stories: Inscriptions on Textiles

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Textiles are of great importance both for the aristocratic courtly culture as well as for the clerical culture of the Middle Ages because they are usually used to mark and shape a visual border between the inside and outside.[365] Stone, metal, glass and wood are also used for the purpose of marking and shaping a visual border. Compared to these materials, however, textiles excel in this capacity because they are flexible and can be produced and designed in a variety of ways. What they do less well is protect the interior from external violence or unwanted access.[366] There are three specific properties and functions of textiles, which are also relevant for inscriptions on the textiles:

1. Flexibility: On the one hand, textiles are locomobile, i. e. a cloth, a dress, a tent can easily be moved from one place to another as a whole. On the other hand, they are also elastic, i. e. they adapt to the interior they create or encase. Therefore, textiles are typically used to cover movable objects such as human or animal bodies (clothing, horse blankets, etc.) or to create ephemeral interiors (tents).
2. Drawing a line: Textiles do not create limits that are insurmountable, but primarily borders that restrict a person’s vision. In most cases (tents, clothes, curtains, wrapping), this

creates an interior protected from the eyes of those standing outside. In reverse, a special interior space can also be conceived and imagined when the border to the outside is highlighted by textile boundaries (tapestries).

3. Symbolicity: The textiles that draw these boundaries have surfaces that are particularly suitable for making symbolic statements, either by the material design of the surfaces (colours, use of special threads made of wool, silk, gold, etc.) or by the application of signs of any kind (images, texts).[367] The semantics of colours and precious fabrics (silk, brocade, velvet, etc.) and ornamentation through woven or dyed patterns or fabric combinations are particularly popular in chasubles and clothes worn by the nobility.

If there are textual characters on textiles, these can have various functions:[368] They can commemorate those who donated or received them. Inscriptions on textiles can identify what can be seen on the fabric or what is covered by the fabric. Occasionally they also convey a story or an excerpt from a story (such as the famous Bayeux Tapestry). Different kinds of statements are also popular, often in the form of sayings (mottos or devices) or verses from the Bible or the Koran.

Textiles, preserved or narrated, can be found in the earliest cultures.[369] There they fulfil important social and cultural functions as both clothing and furnishing elements in dwellings. “Textiles have been, and still are, used, both in dress and in furnishings, to enable people to distinguish themselves from others and to locate themselves within their societies”.[370] However, textiles which have characters on them in addition to their other practical functions—i.e. script-bearing artefacts made of woven fabrics—seem to be a relatively recent phenomenon.

Even though there are some instances of inscribed textiles from antiquity, it was not until the Christian and Islamic Middle Ages that script-bearing textiles gained widespread acceptance.[371] Numerous such artefacts have been preserved since the early Middle Ages.[372]

Stories in which such script-bearing textiles are mentioned are altogether quite rare. Textile artefacts are of course often components of narrative worlds. The mere existence of textile artefacts in the narrative world, however, does not necessitate that these things also receive the narrator's attention. Not every single flag, every saddle blanket or skin of a tent becomes a subject of description or deliberate regard. Most of these artefacts are not even mentioned, though some of them may become an element of an elaborate and vivid ekphrastic description, like Erec's coronation robe in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* (c. 1170) (6674–6747)[373] or Enite's horse and its rug in Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* (c. 1185) (7476–7757).[374] Narrated inscriptions on textiles begin to accumulate significantly from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. During this time we find numerous narratives in which characters—especially knights, lovers and allegorical personifications—wear texts on their clothes. This probably has to do with an actual trend in fashion, the wearing of devices on clothes, which was established in courtly aristocratic culture at that time. In earlier centuries there are only isolated examples which do not yet form part of an established practice or tradition.

Disregarding preserved artefacts evidencing actual trends in fashion to focus exclusively on medieval narratives, one may distinguish two groups of script-bearing textiles, namely tents and clothing, to which this chapter will dedicate a section each.[375] A third and last section presents three unique examples, namely the script-bearing textiles in the Philomela myth, in Marie de France's *Laüstic* and in Garcilaso de la Vega. The last example from the early sixteenth century deals with texts embroidered onto a tapestry: although tapestries, which often bear elements of script, have been widely documented in courtly culture since the twelfth century at the latest, there are only very few medieval narratives featuring these outstanding and valuable combinations of writing and images.[376]

1Inscriptions on Tents

An inscription on a tent in Hartmann's *Erec* illustrates well the

semantic potential that lies in the narrated inscription.[377] In the last episode of the romance called "Joie de la Curt", Erec comes to a mythical tree garden where the knight Mabonagrin and his lover had entrenched themselves a long time ago in order to live their love's bliss away from people and to, if necessary, kill all intruders (Mabonagrin has already impaled 80 skulls on sticks). The tent Erec sees is the tent in which Mabonagrin's beloved is staying:[378]

nû sach er [Erec] *vor im dort*	Now he [Erec] saw in front of him
eine pavelûne stân,	a tent standing there
rîch unde wol getân,	splendid and beautiful.
beide hôch und wît,	It was tall as well as wide and
zweier slahte samît,	(fashioned) out of two different kinds of velvet
von strichen swarz unde wîz	patterned in black and white stripes
und gemâl en allen vlîz.	and ornamented meticulously.
dâ stuonden entworfen an	On it were devised
beidiu wîp unde man,	both men and women
und die vogele sam si vlügen,	and birds that appeared to be flying but
doch si die liute dar an trügen,	(the images) were playing tricks on the observers;
diu tier wilde unde zam,	(also there were) wild and tame animals
ob iegelîchem sîn nam,	above each their name;
diu bilde von golde.	the pictures were fashioned out of gold.

(8901–8914)

The painted and inscribed tent is an ambiguous *Ding-Symbol*, an artefact enabling, even offering, a symbolic reading of the perverse situation in the tree garden. A tent essentially consists of textiles and is, therefore, not a safe or a permanent dwelling. But it always implies a temporal limitation ("flexibility"). As a rule, a tent is in one place only for a certain period of time; it is used temporarily. In this scene, however, the opposite is the case: Mabonagrin's defensive aggression aims to ensure that his love relationship lasts forever. In this sense, the tent itself already alludes to the wrongness of the couple's arrangement.

A tent also emphasises the boundary between inside and outside ("drawing the line"): what is inside should be hidden (the isolationist love between Mabonagrin and his partner), and what is on the outside is meant to be openly displayed (the precious pictures of people and animals). This constellation, not immediately suspect, is made relevant when linked to Enite's horse, which the narrator has described in detail shortly before. This horse also wears preciously decorated fabrics: a blanket, a

saddle and a saddle cover. But while Mabonagrin's lover sits *in* the tent—so to speak *under* or *behind* the painted tent wall—Enite sits *on* an extravagantly embroidered horse. With Enite everything is public, turned outwards; she sits on all the stories and pictures of animals and nature like a crown. The surface of the tent is full of signs ("symbolic"): it is in itself like a white sheet of parchment with black lines (8906). On this "sheet" something is presented as alive that is actually dead. As a consequence, the narrator identifies this as a fraud (8911). The insight can be regarded as a commentary on the whole situation: what first strikes the reader as paradisiacal and vibrant in the *locus amoenus* of the tree garden is only an illusion, obscuring the reality of death behind it.

The illusion of the animals "being alive" is also mentioned with regard to Enite's horse. However, instead of mentioning the species of the fish depicted on the blanket, the narrator ironically points out that whoever wanted to learn their identities would have to dive into the sea and explore them himself. Rather than demanding an effort from the recipient, the narrator presents us with exactly such animal names written as inscriptions on the tent in the tree garden: writing is thus used to disambiguate. The names define and the letters "kill" what should actually live. The inscription is thus serving a fraud—a capability of signs that is also characteristic of inscriptions on clothing (see below).[379]

In later courtly romances and allegories (in the German-speaking area especially in the "*Minnereden*") there are tents painted and inscribed on the outside.[380] Sometimes, just like the precious materials the tents are made of, this simply serves as a courtly representation. But remarkably often the inscriptions are associated with the theme of love. Tents reproduce sayings, statements made by their inhabitants—who live in tents because they are displaced persons and have found a temporary refuge there. The first-person narrator discovers such an arrangement in *Der Minne Gericht* vom Elenden Knaben (fifteenth century), where the personified virtues banished from the world have pitched their tents in the forest and make statements about themselves on their tents, e. g. the woman Constancy:[381]

"ich haiß Staet, die zuo lieben gehoert.	"I am called Constancy, who is part of loving.
wa ich nit bin, da wirt zerstoert	Where I am not, love is quickly destroyed,
bald lieb und wechset dar usß laid,	resulting in suffering.
man erwirbt alle ding mit staetekait."	All things can be acquired by means of
(907–910)	constancy."

However, tents can feature not only statements about the personalised virtues, but also mnemonic verses that store knowledge for the lovers.[382] The narrator therefore comments: *frow Stetten rim daß waß der; | nun merck ain yeglicher buoler* ("That was the rhyme of Lady Constancy, which every lover should remember well", 905f.). Sayings that teach and make statements about love can also be found on the clothes of personifications. Perhaps the occurrence of such sayings on tents is a phenomenon derived from this.

2Inscriptions on Dresses

Clothes may indicate social status and belonging as well as the current spiritual and emotional condition of their wearers ("symbolicity"). Undoubtedly, contemporaries had to be able—and were able—to read textiles and to interpret sartorial signs properly. It is also not surprising that courtly literature invests massively in textiles as signs, establishing a sartorial standard for the self-fashioning of knights, lords and ladies. While heroic epic is more concerned with armament and Scandinavian sagas put little value on clothing, Continental courtly romances often use opportunities to portray and present splendid, rare and precious fabrics. The costume of a knight or lady is an important means of displaying social status and dignity; a costume is therefore part of the complex semiotics of courtly characters, their spaces and practices.[383] Mostly, however, these dresses are not inscribed; an inscription might be deemed superfluous since the textiles are already sufficiently legible in terms of their material, colour, form and cost.

Script-bearing dresses explicitly crop up for the first time with the numerous personifications in the Latin allegories produced by clerical writing culture. One reason for this could be that the text-related practices of copying and compiling in the monastic scriptorium promoted a vision of the world as almost entirely composed of texts or conceptualised in textual metaphors. Already in Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae* (sixth century) Lady Philosophy appears in a ripped robe, which is inscribed with letters that represent a ladder as an image of ascension (1. P., 3–5). The *Anticlaudianus* by Alanus ab Insulis from the twelfth century features personifications whose dresses in some cases are completely covered with text. Personified Grammar even wears a dress made of papyrus (2.410). Logic's garment spells out, in 46 (!) verses (3.35–80), everything that Logic can do and how it works.

"Flexibility" and "drawing the line" do not seem to be particularly relevant for these textiles. Instead, these figures ultimately only consist of their visible and legible surfaces.[384] The personifications are nothing but "texture". The inside, which is actually covered by the dress, is identical to what can be seen on the outside. This corresponds to Alanus's idea that the personification's entire agency lies in this inscription: […] *ut artem | Et proprios pugiles et luctam poscere credas* ("[…] so that you may believe that art [= logic] keeps its own fist fighters and challenges them to fight", 905f.).

In vernacular literature, larger numbers of inscribed dresses of personifications can only be found in the later Middle Ages. One early example is the cloak of Lady Wealth (Richesse) from the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris (after 1235), on which stories of dukes and kings are embroidered (1051 and 1056–1058). However, these seem to serve courtly representation and memoria, as the dress here is merely mentioned and not characterised any further. In the fifteenth century personifications also wear sayings on their clothes and make statements that come across more like contributions to a discussion or debate. In Robert Henryson's *The Ressoning betwix Aige and Yowth* (late fifteenth century) the personification of age appears with a document most likely attached to her chest that reads: *O yowth, thy flowris fedis fellone sone* ("O youth, your flowers fade extremely soon", 17). This inscription only indirectly says something about the wearer of the dress; but it directly and critically addresses its interlocutor. Taking positions in discussions and public affairs in this manner is perhaps the most important function of inscriptions on clothes, a feature which can also be found in the non-allegorical characters of romances.

Although occasionally textiles merely identify their bearers,[385] the surface of the clothing is often used to make a statement about the "inside" that is hidden by the fabric. This function of inscriptions emerges even before the fashion of wearing devices (mottos, slogans) becomes established in Europe (see below). In Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm* (early thirteenth century) Heimrich, Willehalm's father, wears a T ("Tau", 406,17–19) on his tunic in the battle against the heathen, signifying the cross as well as the idea of redemption. Thereby, he publicly displays what defines him internally. Not only does it identify the fighter as a Christian, it also testifies that he is ready to die like Christ for the righteous (i. e. the Christian) cause. The "flexibility" of textiles proves to be ideally suited for this purpose because the inscribed clothing connects to the body like a second skin and remains fully

visible. The common act of "drawing the line" between outside and inside is abolished here: observation from outside is not really restricted, the inside is not particularly concealed; instead, the gaze is readjusted, so that one can see and read exactly what constitutes a person's inner being and attitude via the sartorial signs. Thus the "symbolicity" of textiles becomes a confession—it ultimately reveals a truth that is permanently and publicly worn on the body.

This "textile" revelation of an inner truth is especially used for love matters.[386] In a fourteenth-century Minnerede, for instance, Lady Love gives the lover a rhyme to wear on his clothes: *Min liep mir liebet iemer | Dem brich ich trúwe niemer* ("My beloved I will like forever, I will never break her loyalty").[387] In a way, this resembles a magical effect here, since Lady Love promises that if he wears these verses faithfully on his clothes, his life will always remain follow the path of happiness. At the same time Lady Love advises him to say goodbye to his beloved and leave—since under the current circumstances he cannot hope for any success. The inscription on the dress is therefore not aimed at producing an immediate effect, but at a future success through the permanent presentation of a universal, trans-historical truth. The inscription apparently performs a kind of documentary function (like a record or charter). The fact that such an inscription on clothing works to validate an individual, however, particularly works in the late Middle Ages once written documents have become the wide-spread form of documentation and legitimation.[388]

The courtly fashion of inscribing clothes became established throughout Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[389] Moreover, the inscription of clothes with devices is not simply the inscription of an artefact that is independent of the body. Robert Folger and Stephanie Béreiziat-Lang have shown, using Ibero-Romanesque knightly tales as an example, that in pre-modern epistemology this fashion corresponds to the inscription of a body surface which is not identified with the object world, but rather attributed to the sphere of the self.[390] Carrying devices was, therefore, part of one's self-fashioning. The textiles, which in principle draw a visual boundary, become a part of the body of the dressed person. "Symbolicity" thus becomes a particularly strong form of identification.

This manner of making a public and permanent statement about one's inner attitude towards love or one's beloved may of course be misapplied or abused. Who (if not Lady Love herself, as in the previous example!) vouches for a statement's truth? As the tent in *Erec* demonstrates, writing always includes the possibility

of deception, the possibility of incongruity between inside and outside, as when the clothing and the meaning of the inscriptions obscure what actually lies beneath the surface: the heart, the genuine disposition. For this reason the first-person narrator in the Minnerede *Von den Buchstaben* (beginning of the fifteenth century) notes that many people wear letters on their clothes and asks a group of ladies what the letters mean.[391] The ladies, considering the fashion excessive and a public scam, interpret the letters ironically: The "A" stands for "*Affe*" (monkey), the "B" for "*Bube*" (knave) [...], the "E" for "*Esel*" (donkey), etc.

3Women Weaving Messages in Fabrics

The three final examples tie in with this idea of an increased identification of the self with texts and textiles. To begin with, it is no coincidence that it is three women who weave their stories here. In the Middle Ages, the production of textiles was typically regarded as a female task. The weaving, sewing and embroidery of pictures and texts on textiles is also associated with women in most stories. Sometimes, inscribing textiles almost appears to function as a substitution for the female voice.[392]

1. In the ancient myth of Philomela, the female protagonist weaves her tale of woe into a white cloth, using a red thread. Tereus, her sister Procne's husband, has raped her. To prevent Philomela from publicly disgracing him, he had capturedher and cut out her tongue. This incident is now written in the cloth that Philomela sends to her sister Procne from her prison in order to let her know about the crime. Both sisters then take brutal revenge on Tereus.[393] In the long tradition of this myth, the different versions sometimes refer to embroidered pictures, sometimes to embroidered text. While Ovid, providing the earliest recorded version (around the year 8) leaves it open to the imagination whether it is pictures or texts, medieval authors often disambiguate and have Philomela embroider or weave either pictures (Chrétien de Troyes, around 1170) or letters (Albrecht von Halberstadt, around 1200) into the fabric.[394]
2. In *Laüstic*, a lay by Marie de France (c. 1135–1200), the wife of a baron weaves the story of the discovery of her secret love into a cloth. The husband notices that she spends her nights sitting at the window. He discovers that the woman and her secret lover, who lives in the neighbouring castle,

gaze at each other every night from their windows. When confronted by her husband, the woman claims that she is merely listening to the nightingale's singing. As a consequence, the husband has the nightingale captured, kills it in his wife's presence and throws the carcass at her. The woman wraps the dead nightingale in the inscribed cloth and sends the package as a message to her lover.[395]

3. In his third eclogue the Spanish poet Garcilaso de la Vega (1501–1536) tells the story of a nymph who embroiders a tragedy of love in a fabric while cheerfully engaging in needlework with other nymphs. A bucolic scene on the fabric portrays nymphs in a *locus amoenus*; however, one of the nymphs lies murdered on the ground, while another carves an inscription into a tree. Inscribed into the tree are two names: Elisa, the dead nymph, and Nemoroso, who mourns for her.[396] The names are codes for the poet Garcilaso himself and for his deceased lover, to whom he dedicates these eclogues—as he hinted at the beginning of the text—in order to make her immortal. The narrative layer of the stitching nymph alludes to the poetic artificiality (*Gemachtheit*) of the eclogue (in the style of a *mise en abyme*) and highlights Garcilaso in his role as a poet and producer of an enduring work of art (textile and text). Beyond that, the narrative layer of the embroidered *locus amoenus* portrays Garcilaso in his role as a lover, who mourns and thinks about his loved one: This commemoration is in turn converted into material writing, i. e. the tree inscription, which becomes immortalised. A complex network of reflection and self-referentiality is arranged successively here, which may also be understood as an expression of self-empowerment by the poet.

This usage highlights the "flexibility" of textiles as a medium, cloth being an ideal material means of transporting a secret, coded message in plain sight. Philomela has to smuggle her message past her tormentor, her own brother-in-law. The wife in *Laüstic* needs to cunningly inform her lover why she can no longer appear at the window at night. The nymph in Garcilaso's eclogue both unveils and veils the love story of the poet himself. In these examples, the mode of "drawing the line" between inside and outside appears in a specific constellation that has less to do with a real spatial (topological) dimension, but more with a metaphorical quality. Although in *Laüstic* the nightingale is actually hidden under the cloth, it is decisive that, as in the other

examples, the not yet perceived “inside”—the, so to speak, “true” story—is revealed and nevertheless remains hidden, at least temporarily. The “symbolicity” of textiles thus lies in a kind of poetry whose signs are ambiguous: Philomela’s red yarn on a white cloth additionally symbolises her rape; and the dead nightingale in *Laüstic* can also be read as a *Ding-Symbol* for destroyed love. Thus the textile inscription simultaneously conceals and reveals. Meaning can only be understood by those who know that there is a message is to be deciphered and who know that the surface bears signs referring to a hidden truth. Thus, the narratives telling of inscribed materials also become the mirror image of a mode of narration that reveals inner truths and simultaneously encodes them in the images of poetic speaking.

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Artefacts

Christine Neufeld

Writing Spaces: Inscriptions on Architecture

When it comes to inscriptions in medieval literature there is likely no example more famous than the gate to Hell in the *Inferno* of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. The anaphoric intonations of the tercet beginning Canto 3 summon Dante's hellish vision even for the popular imagination, making the inscription a synecdoche for the poem itself.

Per me si va ne la città dolente,	Through me the way into the suffering city,
per me si va ne l'etterno dolore,	Through me the way to the eternal pain,
per me si va tra la perduta gente.	Through me the way that runs among the lost,
Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore;	Justice urged on my high Artificer;
fecemi la divina podestate,	My maker was divine Authority,
la somma sapïenza e 'l primo amore.	The highest Wisdom, and the primal Love.
Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create	Before me nothing but eternal things
se non etterne, e io etterno duro.	Were made, and I endure eternally.
Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'entrate.	Abandon every hope, who enter here.

(III.1–9)

The familiarity of this inscription obscures to some extent the fact that the inscribed gate actually represents "an interpretive impediment" for the pilgrim Dante.[397]

Queste parole di colore oscuro	These words—their aspect was obscure—I read
vid' ïo scritte al sommo d'una porta;	inscribed above a gateway, and I said:
per ch'io: "Maestro, il senso lor m'è duro".	"Master, their meaning is difficult for me".

(III.10–12)

The interpretive challenge posed by the inscription has given scholars pause as well.[398] As Freccero observes, "[t]he uncertainty of the commentators about whether the dark color is a physical description or a characterisation of the meaning of the phrase, its *rhetorical* color, suggests that they cannot decide whether the pilgrim is *seeing* or *reading* the inscription."[399] Scholars alert to medieval hermeneutics have engaged rhetorical models to

explain the challenge posed by the text—referencing, for example, the disciples' incomprehension in John 6:61 ("This saying is hard, and who can hear it?") or Augustine's discussion in *De Genesi ad Litteram* of the uncomprehending reader in terms of the Book of Daniel's mysterious writing on the wall.[400] Attending to the materiality of the sign, the physical "darkness" and "hardness" that reinforce the psychological burden or hermeneutic labour the inscription implies, however, draws attention to the fact that how we envision the structure bearing the inscription can also inform how we read this passage. The impression that we are encountering a direct citation of the inscription in Dante's poem can blur the distinctions between monumental epigraph and codex for readers. Nevertheless, visualising the object that bears this text begins to flesh out significant distinctions in these material textual cultures. Encountering the inscriptions of a semantically-charged built world in the Middle Ages means what we see can determine what we read.

As an architectural structure, Hell's gate has been imagined as a Roman triumphal arch and a medieval city gate; its inscription has been related to funereal epitaphs, as well as to the portal inscriptions found on Romanesque churches.[401] These monumental, civic, funereal and ecclesiatical iterations manifest how architecture will be defined in this chapter broadly as locostatic edifaces designed for human use.[402] We tend to imagine inscribed edifaces as very stable in that they are produced in materials that are typically fixed and durable, and are designed as public texts to communicate effectively to many people, often repeatedly and over long periods of time.[403] Taking into consideration work by scholars of 'the spatial turn', however, reveals that despite their immobility inscribed architectural artefacts can be profoundly dynamic. Linda Safran explains, "[m]eaning in medieval public spaces was communicated by the combination of a spatial and decorative system, images, and texts, and as such the reception of textual messages was affected by their physical and decorative context".[404] Moreover, inscriptions in architecture teach us that space is more than a container or material/geographical territory by drawing attention to "spatial practices". For "space" is also generated by movement, usage and narratives (civic, historical, mythic) and organises not only physical matter but society itself. Inscriptions can play important roles in spatial practices, by, for example, establishing a space as local or global, creating borders and passages, or administering belonging and exclusion.

If we examine Dante's gate the inscribed warning takes on different dimensions depending on the spatial practices imagined by the reader. Robert Hollander draws on the urban landscape of medieval Italy, filled with the architectural vestiges of the Roman Empire, to imagine the inscription as a Christian variation of the victorious verses engraved in Roman triumphal arches.[405] Casting the sinner as a prisoner of war being led back to "that Rome of which Christ is Roman" (*Purg*. XXXII.102), the gate becomes a memorial monument whose assertion orients the viewer eschatologically rather than geographically, even as it draws on the architectural features of a specific locality to characterise Divine Justice. In contrast, envisioning the gate's inscription as a more universally recognisable medieval city gate, as Guido Mazzoni does, focuses the reader's attention on the territorial boundary the pilgrim must now cross, distinguishing the wilderness he has traversed from *la città dolente* (*Inf*. III.1) he is about to enter.[406] Here the gate inscription is a contact point between two materially and rhetorically distinct spaces, the allegorical dark wood and the contrapasso of the infernal city, whose "civic" conditions the pilgrim and the reader must both labour to comprehend.

Even as the gate is a conduit between different spaces, the inscription interrupts and qualifies this movement. As Vincent Debiais observes, "inscriptions in doorways invite the reader to stop; to suspend the movement induced by crossing the doorway. The content of epigraphic texts relies on the [...] broadly symbolic implications of changes in space to transform the suspension of the reader's movement into a dramatic understanding of the precise features of the space he is entering".[407] Thus, Freccero's reading of the gate's inscription as analogous to a funerary epitaph, a material presence that marks a spiritual absence, makes it an icon of the metaphysical condition of spiritual deprivation that confronts the reader in the realm beyond.[408] The inscription's role in producing a dramatic understanding is also clear in Calvin Kendall's reading of Dante's inscription as a demonic inversion of the portal inscriptions found in Romanesque church portals which addressed the Christian about to enter in the voice of Christ or the Church: "Each detail—the voice in the first person, the repeated phrase *per me*, the use of the imperative in the last line, the verb *intrate*— shows us how thoroughly Dante had absorbed the convention. This is the voice of hell".[409] Kendall's argument that such portal inscriptions are performative utterances that not only inform but transform the receptive worshipper draws attention to inscription's

contribution to the dynamism of space as a network of affordant materials, practices and imaginings that is continually being negotiated. The inscription in an architecture can be an icon or a voice, a boundary marker or agent of transformation; it orients the viewer in material space, as well as in relation to the past or the future, and thereby shapes identities both individual and communal. The variety of interpretations produced by examining the material context of Dante's famous inscription indicates just how challenging, and how analytically generative, interpreting the inscribed architectural element in medieval literature can be.

A survey of architectural inscriptions in medieval literature reveals that two architectural elements predominate: the monument and the threshold (a gate or doorway). The more detailed analysis that follows in this chapter is organised by several observations based on an overview of the evidence presented in the CRC database and the scholarship in the first half of this volume. First, even as these artefacts are informed by historical developments in medieval architecture and built environments, they are also clearly distinguished by genre. The inscribed monument appears in works with "historical" subjects, in legends of origin or romances set in Greco-Roman antiquity. The inscribed threshold also appears in romances, but is deployed most frequently in genres inclined towards allegory, such as the German Minnereden or Middle English dream visions. Second, while such texts reflect historical developments in material textual cultures, they also draw on an ancient literary tradition of inscribed architecture in Judeo-Christian scripture, as evidenced by medieval versions of the Feast of Belshazzar in the Book of Daniel and visionary works based on the Revelation of St John. Consequently, we will discover that the interpenetration of the material and figurative aspects of architectural inscription that occurs in Dante is representative of a reciprocal relationship between architectural textual culture and book culture in the Middle Ages more generally.

In contrast to the simplistic narrative of the Middle Ages as a progression from orality to textuality that makes writing a feature of modernity, inscribed architecture in medieval literature suggests that writing could be a marker of the past in the medieval imagination. In fact, the tradition of an ancient monument inscribed with a message addressed to future generations is already present in antiquity, as Flavius Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* (93–94 CE) demonstrates:

> I will only endeavor to narrate the story of the progeny of Seth. […] These, being all of virtuous character, inhabited the same country without

> dissension and in prosperity, meeting with no untoward incident to the day of their death; they also discovered the science of the heavenly bodies and their orderly array. Moreover, to prevent their discoveries from being lost to mankind and perishing before they became known—Adam having predicted a destruction of the universe, at one time by a violent fire and at another by a mighty deluge of water—they erected two pillars, one of brick and the other of stone, and inscribed their discoveries on both; so that, if the pillar of brick disappeared in the deluge, that of stone would remain to teach men what was graven thereon and to inform them that they had also erected one of brick. It exists to this day in the land of Sciris. (33)

The "two stelae" of Jewish tradition circulate widely in both the Christian East and the West, appearing in, among other things, Byzantine chronologies (sixth century), the Greek *Palaea Historia* (ninth century), the Armenian *History of the Forefathers* (seventeenth century) and the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae* (eighth century) that generates the late medieval Apocryphal lives of Adam and Eve.[410] The transformation of the pillars into tablets of stone (or bronze) and clay in the medieval transmission of the legend nevertheless retains the emphasis on a material preservation of knowledge, in some cases (as in the Armenian *Abel* and Latin Adamic legend) even portraying this act of inscription as the invention of writing itself.[411] The materials characterise the monument (and by extension writing) as a tool that allows the past to communicate with the present. Decoding the message embedded in the landscape, furthermore, offers information for the future rather than merely reflecting the past, a theme that remains consistent from the original account of a Sethian transmission of astronomical knowledge to Eve's account of original sin for the benefit of humanity in the Adamic Apocrypha.

Remarkably, inscribed pillars play a similar role in the mythical prehistory of Southern Spain presented in *Estoria de España*, a chronicle written under the supervision of King Alfonso X between 1270 and 1284. [412] The inscriptions of "all knowledge and the nature and function of things" that the legendary Eastern King Rocas transcribes from seventy toppled brass and stone pillars into a codex grant him foreknowledge about the places he visits. In this case these inscriptions also enable him to actively intervene in the future by way of his own inscriptions—his marmorial inscription of "Roma" casts Romulus as an instrument of an imperial destiny already written. The illustrator of the first Alfonsine presentation copy of the *Estoria*, MS Escorial Y.I.2 (c. 1272–1274), employs the same motif in his miniature depicting the civilising hero of ancient Iberia, Hercules. While the literary text does not specify that the marble slab on six stone pillars

which the Greek King erects to mark the future site of Seville is inscribed, in the illustration (fol. 5r.) the marble slab bears the inscription: *:AQVI:SERA:POBLADA:LA:GRANT:CIBDAT*: (THE GREAT CITY WILL BE SETTLED HERE).[413] The inscriptional acts ascribed to Rocas and Hercules in King Alfonso's historiographical efforts transform the architectural ruins of past empires on the Iberian Peninsula into prophetic announcements of his own supremacy (as the heir of Hercules and Julius Caesar) over the other Hispanic kingdoms, and thereby also support his international claim to the throne of Holy Roman Emperor.[414]

Alfonso's historiography highlights the political uses of inscription in architecture as a way of organising historical knowledge, which in the Middle Ages primarily meant engaging with the Classical past. Monumental inscriptions typically appear in the context of medieval romances inherited from Greco-Roman sources, such as the legends of Apollonius of Tyre or Alexander the Great, or in tales set in antiquity. In *Apollonius von Tyrland* by Heinrich von Neustadt (early fourteenth century), for instance, the hero receives two honourary columns commemorating his deeds.[415] The first one, a marble pillar with a golden jewel-encrusted statue representing the hero, erected after Apollonius rescues the citizens of Tarsus from a terrible famine and helps them enhance their city, makes explicit its memorial function. The inscription appears as a letter, a *groß brieff* (1224), borne in the statue's right hand; the first person and present tense of the text create the illusion that the viewer is receiving an eyewitness account from the hero himself:[416]

"*Ich kunig Appolonius,*	"I, King Apollonius,
Furste da zu Tyrlant,	Prince of Tyre,
Pey disem pild tuen pekant	With this image proclaim
Das ich die Tarsere	That I the people of Tarsus
Loßt außs grosser schwere	Rescued from great suffering
Mit leibnär und mit speyse.	With nourishment and food.
Da von pin ich zu preyse	Therefore I am, to be honoured,
Her gesatzt, wie es ergie,	Set here, as it happened,
Und pin sein gezeug alhie."	And am right here [as] the witness to it."
(1226–1234)	

Whereas the Old English *Apollonius* (eleventh century) and the *Gesta Romanorum* version (early fourteenth century) follow the Greco-Roman original in focusing iconographically on the hero holding grain in his right hand and grinding it with his left foot (with the inscription on the pedestal), the Viennese doctor Heinrich von Neustadt deploys instead the cultural capital of medieval scribal culture to reinforce the significance of the

inscription. The epistle evokes not just the hero's ability to communicate in absentia but quite possibily the legitimating documentary function of the chronicler. Here the inscription is an authenticating device on various levels, a role inscriptions already play in Classical literature.[417] In contrast, the brass column erected for Apollonius in Metelin (Mytilene) recounting in the third person his restoration of the city walls and tower and praising Tarsia (17006–17028) is much less dynamic. In both instances, however, as a benefactor using gold and silver to commission improvements to a city's infrastructure (1179–1188; 16995–17002), the hero's ability to shape history is emblematised by his patronage of building projects that organise and support a particular civic community. The communities' willingness to be shaped by the hero is symbolised by their initiation of inscriptional projects, producing statues that mark themselves as part of a hero's domain.

If such monuments construct Apollonius as a *pater patriae* in the mode of the Roman Emperor, the Alexander romances illustrate precisely how literary narratives understood inscription to serve imperial projects.[418] Already in the earliest version of the romance by Pseudo-Callisthenes, Alexander's imperial ambition is epitomised by his inscription of himself on the landscape. The fifth-century Armenian version of *Alexander* (part of the Alpha MSS group) describes in detail the founding of Alexandria, the centre of the Hellenistic world: "And when he had laid the foundation for most of the city, he wrote upon it the five letters: A, B, C, D, E; A, Alexander; B, the greatest king; C, of the greatest nations; D, in the place of Aramazd; E, descended and built a unique city".[419] Here the inscription coincides with the creation of a space, not only through the foundation of a city but through the outright conquest of territory—a reshaping of geographic and social space as borders and hierarchies shift. The *Alexanderroman* (Wernigerode MS) represents this appropriation of physical space through two honourary columns Alexander erects to commemorate his victories (4440–4462, 4864–4879).

Vil pald hiez er werben	Soon afterwards he gave the order
Daz man mir maister breht,	to get me a masterful craftsman,
Der kunst und wicz bedeht	skillful and prudent,
Vier seul auf richten	to erect four pillars
Und dar ein beslihten	and to write into them
Wie ich die land an der stat	how I have swiftly conquered
Mit meiner hant bezwungen hat.	the realms with my [own] hand.
Daz war als dar ein gegraben	All of that was carved there
Mit puchstaben wol erhaben,	with well embossed letters,
Krichisch, indisch und latein,	Greek, Indian, and Latin,

Ebrayisch sprach da sein	and Hebrew language had to be there,
Müst, dar umb, wer ymmer dar	so that whoever would come past,
Köm, daz er nem war	that he would notice
Wie gar mit freier hant	how thoroughly and sovereignly
Allexander die land	Alexander had brought
Het braht in sein gewalt.	the realms under his command.
(4864–4879)[420]	

The text's focus on the pillars' multilingual inscriptions highlights that inscription functions here as more than a local memorial. These inscriptions address a global, multicultural set of readers who must acknowledge Alexander's possession of this space and reflect on their own positions within it.

In their frequent replication of Classical epigraphy the *romans antiqs* could be considered the narrative equivalent of the architectural *spolia* medieval inhabitants of former Roman urban spaces would have encountered. Yet, as Amy Remensnyder observes, even as a monument is constructed to fix a particular historical moment and its interpretion, "this meaning is hardly fixed; it is destabilised by memory itself, which over time reinterprets the monument to fit present needs".[421] In the Middle Ages both physical and imagined inscriptions from the imperial past were deployed to give public spaces and architecture new Christian meanings. Stephano Riccioni's discussion of the ecclesiatical and civic efforts to renew the image of Rome in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, for example, emphasises the importance of monumental inscriptions as symbols of authority that could be appropriated for new agendas.[422] In addition to the proliferation of actual "public lettering" on monuments and churches, on liturgical furniture and in open spaces, pilgrim's guides and travel literature also overwrote pagan artefacts as Christian documents.[423] Of particular interest to literary scholars are works such as *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* (1140–1143), in which Benedict, a canon of St Peter's, provides a guide to the Eternal City's sites and monuments which reframes pagan architecture in terms of Christian triumphalism. According to Riccioni, inscriptions play an important role in such a project:

> On the memorial of Caesar, the Needle, near the Vatican, Benedict notes inscriptions in "Latin letters beautifully illuminated." He also transcribes an inscription: Caesar, tantus eras quantus et orbis, / sed nunc in modico clauderis antro (Caesar, you were once as great as the world, / now in what a small cavity are you sealed). Such an inscription never existed on the site. It is a citation of the *Planctus Hlothari I Caesaris*, in which Lothar (d. 855) is called the first caesar, that is emperor.[424]

With this, and other similar inscriptions stemming from literary sources and likely never carved on monuments, Benedict "rewrites" the image of Rome.[425]

The mobilisation of writing in Romanesque architecture following the Gregorian Reform clearly also draws on literary traditions for the symbolic aspects of architectonic elements.[426] Inscription on architectural elements makes a space interactive both physically and imaginatively. In his work on medieval doorway inscriptions, Vincent Debiais reminds us: "As medieval reading is a whole body activity that uses the eyes, hands and feet, seeing the text sets the passer-by in motion; it can also cause him to stop in front of the door. It offers the possibility of a journey from the outside to within the building; it could also invite the reader to walk around the church".[427] This movement from outside to inside was emphasised by the portals and porticos featured in the new churches being built, which frequently bore inscriptions. The extension of ecclesiatical space into the medieval urban environment is mediated by writing which here invites the viewer to contemplate the tensions between secular and sacred spaces, rather than between past and present. Riccioni's identification of the visual similarities of these architectural inscriptions to the new luxury liturgical manuscripts of the period emphasises the way writing here, too, is an instrument of prestige: "It seems clear that the display of these inscriptions was as important as the porticoes they graced. Writing in the scripts used in the most sumptuous Bibles and liturgical manuscripts was like displaying a kind of 'banner' of the Church of Rome for those who might recognise the link to manuscript culture".[428] The allegorisation of the church that Kendall delineates in his analysis of Romanesque portal inscriptions highlights how medieval hermeneutical scholarship on Christ's words in John 10:9— "I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved: and he shall go in, and go out, and shall find pastures."—endowed inanimate architectonic elements with symbolic vitality. Given that book culture helped produce such architectural semantics, it should not come as a surprise, then, that similar architectural features appear and are put to various uses in medieval literature from the high Middle Ages onwards.

Of course, we do find some references to inscribed gates or doorways that draw on the physical features of historical environments, both Classical and medieval.[429] The reader interested in inscribed architecture thus faces the challenge of negotiating between symbolically rich *realia* and abstract literary

conventions. The description of an inscription dating the foundation of a cloister in the Minnerede *Das weltliche Klösterlein* (c. 1472), for example, is typical of actual epigraphy even though the poem is allegorical. As Linda Safran explains in her overview of public textual cultures (both Christian and Jewish) in Southern Italy, medieval epigraphy tends to fall under the following categories: dedicatory (staking a claim to a particular act performed by an individual or group); didactic (conveying information); horatory (exhorting readers to act on behalf of the subject of the text); funerary (asserting the piety or status of the deceased); or devotional texts (invocations soliciting divine assistance).[430] Having a sense of the contextual restrictions of historical public texts helps readers to ascertain when narrated architectural inscriptions draw instead on established literary models from visionary texts, such as the gates of the New Jerusalem inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel in The Revelation of St John 21:12, or didactic texts, like the Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimna*.[431] Thus, when we encounter the doorframes inscribed with individual virtues in the *Tugendburg* (Castle of Virtues) of Reinbot von Durne's *Der Heilige Georg* (mid-thirteenth century) we recognise that we have moved from the mimetic depiction of a semantically-laden material environment to what Béreiziat-Lang's discussion of Ramon Llull characterises as a materialisation of knowledge.[432] This strategy is also evident in what Mary Carruthers terms "architectural" mnemonic techniques, a spatialisation of memory most famously illustrated by the concept of the memory palace.[433]

Of especial interest to literary scholars are narratives which move beyond using inscribed architecture for organisational or informational purposes to explore the performative function of inscription by depicting scenes of reading. While Dante's gate inscription pauses the narrative to contemplate the interpretive dilemma, there are also texts where the inscription itself becomes an actual barrier preventing the movement a threshold invites. Hugo von Montfort's poem no. 28 (c. 1400), for example, features a protagonist whose attempts to enter what he will later discover is the Grail Castle are prevented by a guard who demands that he read the inscriptions on the gate: *und kanst du lesen*, / *sich eben an das tor!* / *es mag hart anders wesen*, / *du beleibist auch davor* ("If you can read, take a look at the gate! It can hardly be otherwise, you will remain outside", st. 19).[434] The prohibitions against criminals (murderers, traitors, heretics, frauds, thieves, etc.) and the gruesome punishments meted out for their offenses recall civic bylaws and do not deter the speaker from confidently

demanding to enter (with *freýem mút*, st. 30). The guard exclaims that either he has not yet read everything or he is a saint (st. 33), directing his attention back to the verses above the gate denying entrance to those who have broken the Ten Commandments or committed any of the Seven Deadly Sins. Now the narrator observes, *ich las die vers, die warent hert* ("I read the verses, they were severe", st. 40) and concedes to the guard that he does not deserve to enter. Thereafter follows a series of lectures delivered by members of the Grail society, similar to the allegorical figures of the Minnerede, offering him spiritual advice. The hardness of the *hert* verses, evoking legal and confessional discursive traditions, presents, I would argue, the harsh "letter of the law" which is then mitigated by the oral guidance of the various teachers encouraging the narrator to strive for grace. Our poet does not ultimately achieve entrance to the castle in the poem but he does progress on his own spiritual path.

The dreamer-poet of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, in contrast, achieves entry without insight. Chaucer's dream vision begins when the narrator falls asleep reading Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* in the hope of learning some *certeyn thing* (20). In his dream Scipio Africanus the Elder guides the poet to an enclosed garden and a gate with *lettres large y-wroghte* (123). While this Garden containing Venus's temple recalls the famous *locus amoenus* in the *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer clearly models the gate on Dante's, though with significant modifications.[435] The inscription on one half of the gate offers the dreamer a garden of delight: *Thorgh me men gon into that blysful place* / *Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure* (127f.). The inscription on the other half promises only misery: *Thorgh me men gon*, / [...] *Unto the mortal strokes of the spere* / *Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde*" (134–136). Faced with contradictory inscriptions—one inviting him to *passe in, and sped thee faste!* (133) and the other insisting that *eschewing is only the remedye* (140)—the dreamer is paralysed, a state he characterises in strikingly material terms:

Right as, bitwixen adamauntes two	Right as, between two lodestones [magnets]
Of even might, a pece of iren y-set,	Of equal force, a piece of iron is set,
That hath no might to meve to ne fro—	That has no strength to move either to or fro—
[...] *Ferde I; that niste whether me was bet,*	[...] Fared I; that did not know whether it was better [for me]
To entre or leve	To enter or leave,
(148–153)	

Chaucer critics have long focused on how this paralysis at the gate is emblematic of the principle of indeterminacy or undecidability in the poem, ending as it does with the deferral of the formel eagle's choice between her avian suitors, and the dreamer no closer to learning about that *certeyn thing*.[436] The figurative transformation of the dreamer into an inanimate object, ultimately physically shoved through the gate by his guide (*African my gyde* / *Me hente, and shoof in at the gates wyde*, 153f.), highlights his insensibility as well as his immobility. However, this insensibility is not actually detrimental since his guide informs him: *this wryting is nothyng ment by thee* (158).

The gate inscription in the *Parliament of Fowls* is an excellent example of inscriptionality's role in spatial practices that create forms of belonging—marking divisions, for example, in terms of class, gender, race, forms of privilege—through the delineation of separate spheres.[437] Remarkable here is the poem's emphasis of the dreamer's exclusion through the paradoxical revelation that this clearly demarcated threshold is no boundary at all for him because he is not Love's servant (159). The text here may appear undecidable; but in fact it is irrelevant to all but a select few. While historical public texts can certainly address or exclude specific audiences, it is more surprising to find one in an allegorical poem since it refuses the very premise of the dream vision as a narrative created for/by the dreamer. Chaucer flouts the tradition of the architectural inscription which invites interpretation by the proper or designated reader, as in the influential tale of the prophet Daniel at Belshazzar's feast.[438] The neglected inscription, this enigma that will not be decoded, here emphasises the narrator's refusal of the position of authority as the interpreter of texts, the beneficiary of knowledge imparted by venerable guides in books or dreams; it is symptomatic of the ways in which Chaucer grapples with literary tradition and authorship in his corpus more generally.[439] The intertextuality of his gate inscription, moreover, with its clear invocation of Dante, whose gate is also a palimpest of literary allusions, has the potential to reframe how we read those inscriptions as well.

This chapter concludes by considering a short exemplary poem, *Der Heller der armen Frau* (early fourteenth century) to examine the interplay between the ancient tradition of the divine writing on the wall and the mundane world of public textual culture that proliferated in the late Middle Ages. The tale recounts how a king decided to build a cathedral to honour God. When it was completed he commissioned an inscription in golden letters to testify that the church was his initiative, and that he alone had

financed it (*daz ez were sin eines rat* / *und nieman dar an gegeben hat*, 37f.).

His assertion of his patronage here, a conventional dedicatory public text with pious aims, is directed as much to a divine as a mortal audience. And it is the divine audience that responds—in unexpected ways. The king's attempt to write this historical moment into his own spiritual ledger through the inscription backfires embarassingly when he discovers that his name has vanished from the wall overnight, replaced instead by an inscription identifying a poor old woman as the true patroness of the church. A second attempt is also replaced overnight, "as God intended" (*als ez Got selbe hete gedaht*, 48). To solve the mystery the king summons the woman who explains that in her desire to donate the little she had to the church, but fearful of the King's prohibition, she had used a halfpenny to buy some hay, which she had strewn on the streets to feed the oxen pulling the stones for the building project. In this charming version of the widow's mite parable from the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:41– 44, Luke 21:1–4) the old woman's sacrifice makes her gift more precious while also exposing the King's hypocrisy as a kind of spiritual greed.

Understanding how inscriptionality functions in *Der Heller der armen Frau* reveals the exemplum's complexity. Given the literary conventions using architectural inscriptions to illustrate worldly power—the hero's ability to make a mark upon the world—the divine effacement of the king's inscription is a judgment and a reminder of human inconsequentiality in the cosmic scheme of things. If writing in stone represents a human desire to fix a past, a present, or future, the miraculous erasure of the inscription renders the perdurable ephemeral.[440] In fact, this transience—the rapid, competitive over-writing of the texts on the wall—draws attention to the possibility that God's inscription here might be read productively in terms of another form of architectural inscription: graffiti. The king's embarassment at the illicit inscription—he is *versmaht* (44)—suggests that the public text is also a manifestation of his secular sovereignty, which is now compromised. God's intervention comes across at first as an act of vandalism. The poem portrays a struggle for control of the public realm as a social space through the medium of material textual culture, a practice that graffiti stages most dramatically. Like graffiti, God's written intervention is an unsanctioned text applied under cover of darkness; moreover, it is a provocation framed as a challenge to property rights.[441] In this case, both the textual content of the inscription and nature of the inscriptional

act challenge the king's sense of entitlement on physical, social, and spiritual levels.

Graffiti is also writing that is "out of place" which thereby reorganises the space it has overwritten. Here the king is decentred, as his attempts to reinscribe his official narrative demonstrate. The marvel ultimately forces him to become a reader rather than a producer of texts. The inscrutability of this text, the impossibility of a poor old woman being the *stifterinne* (patron, 52) of a cathedral, presents a riddle he and the audience must solve by returning to the figurative architectonics of Christian liturgy. For the divine inscription to be true the material text must dematerialise the architectural project, transforming the cathedral into a spiritual representation of the Church. In this case, the metamorphosis effected in the king through his recognition of the woman's virtue has the potential to transform society itself in that he embraces a redistribution of material modeled on the poor woman's logic. The king's evaluation of the material world changes when he has to recognise that he is a node in a much more complicated network than he previously realised—one made up of coins, hay, oxen, poor people, buildings and the divine. Just as the woman serves God by feeding the working animals on the building site, the king now rewards the virtuous woman (*er mache die vrowen riche an gute sicherliche*, 89f.) and in turn has this service acknowledged by God (99f.). *Der Heller der armen Frau* is fascinating as a moralising commentary on historical public textual culture, perceptively illustrating the private interests and unconsidered consequences of the late medieval patronage of building projects whose public texts we still study.[442] It is also a text richly informed by the imagined architectural inscriptions of medieval literary culture. Its brilliance lies in its focus on the act of inscription itself. Presenting an original adaptation of the widow's mite, the tale recalls, above all, the Book of Daniel. But here, instead of an ominious warning numbering a ruler's days, the *digitus Dei* playfully writes a more just world into being.

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Ricarda Wagner

Tablets and the Poetics of the Premodern Post-It

This chapter explores one of the most familiar text-bearing objects of the Middle Ages. Tablets, sized to be hand-held, initiated writers into the world of literacy. Forbearing and compliant, their waxen surfaces offered themselves to both a student's first attempts at lettering and the confident compositions of a more practised hand. Portable and adaptable to a variety of uses, tablets served as personal companions carried on the body, ready at hand to receive a fleeting thought, an inventory, a calculation, a legal agreement or the first draft of a poem.[443] While hand-held formats and girdle-books suspended from belts were the most common, tablets of varying size could be attached to the writer's person in any number of ways. Charlemagne, for example, was said to have worn a tablet around his neck while learning the alphabet. Tablets, then, lend themselves to everyday writing, but luxury specimens also survive, made of ivory rather than wood and exquisitely decorated to be given as love gifts.[444]

Locomobile and handy, tablets form close associations with their writers and bearers. In this chapter, I will examine such tablet-assemblages in medieval English, German and French literature that associate wax, wood, ivory, brass, clay and stone with lovers, poets and parents. As we shall see, the material vitality of inscribed tablets intersects with desire and doubt, sin and penitence, ancestry and origins. As personal writing companions, tablets provide an interface to express private matters and communicate intimacy. Fashioned for the single purpose of bearing text, they recycle easily and, in case their material is soft enough to yield to even gentle pressure, particularly lend themselves to ephemeral writing that is traced as quickly as it is erased.

But the private, hand-held version is not the only form of the medieval tablet. Literary sources also apply the term to plaques, sheet-like pieces of writing affixed to a surface where they may be read by anyone who passes by. In contrast to books, mounted tablets reveal texts that cannot be closed, and exhibit writing that faces us at all times. I shall argue that such inscribed plaques

function as “premodern post-its” which supplement the exterior of a different object with material text. Being merely add-ons, these post-its must permanently confront the threat of being removed again, their message becoming as ephemeral as the faint letters on a wax tablet. Both the detachable plaque and the erasable hand-held tablet, then, offer their writers and readers a certain degree of control over how long their texts will be visible. As this chapter aims to show, tablets encompass significant opposites in medieval textual and material culture; they are fashioned as personal accessories and public post-its, bearing both temporary scribblings and enduring text.

Dating back to the very beginnings of human verbal expression, the tablet was first devised as a surface on which to materialise memory and to account for things. Clay tablets from ancient Mesopotamia, easy to produce, reusable and inscribed with cuneiform letters, are among the earliest sources for script. About 95 % of these tablets, some of them no larger than a credit card, were used to record the ownership of assets.[445] While the concept of personal property galvanised the development of writing, cultural treasures in the form of stories were also codified in clay. For the select class of Akkadian and Babylonian scribes, however, tablets were only ever an aid to memory. As texts were not meant to be read by anyone who did not already know them, their transmission in cuneiform merely assisted the scribe’s progress in learning them by heart. In schools, which the Akkadians called “tablet houses”, teachers would instruct their students how to inscribe texts not only in clay, but also in their minds. This double practice of writing and memorising gave rise to the trope of the “tablet of the heart”. Commonly used in the didactic exhortations of ancient Mesopotamian and Biblical texts, it encouraged students to conceive of their memory as a workable surface ready to be incised.[446]

The secular literature of the Middle Ages employs the tablet as a metaphor in a related sense, adapting it to discourses of courtly love and desire. Here, the waxen surface and the wooden frame no longer represent the writer’s memory, but serve as an interface to reveal and communicate his or her feelings. This type of “tablet of the heart” is not so much about learning to recall as it is about learning to express, and about daring to materialise interiority.[447] As text-bearing artefacts rather than metaphors, the tablets we find in imaginative literature are personal writing accessories that negotiate emotional rather than cognitive knowledge. Interestingly, as the CRC’s database shows, these material tablets of the heart feature predominantly in romances

that rework texts of classical Roman literature.

The medieval romance of Eneas, written in French around 1160 and adapted into German by Heinrich von Veldeke shortly thereafter, retells Virgil's *Aeneid*, but significantly expands the character of Lavinia, the Italian princess Aeneas/Eneas is destined to marry. While her part in Virgil is silent and limited to references by other characters, both the French and the German versions of the romance zoom in closely on Lavinia's struggle to come to terms with her burgeoning feelings of love for the hero newly arrived from Troy. When her mother notices Lavinia's malaise and puts her on the spot, the princess shies away from naming the man she loves. In the German *Eneasroman*, Lavinia is prompted by her mother to put the name in writing:

ir tavelen si nam
und einen griffel von golde,
dar an si scrîben wolde.
Mit angesten plânete sie daz was
und solde scrîben Ênêas,
dô ir ir mûder urloub gab.

E was der êrste bûchstab,
dar nach N und aber Ê.
diu angest tete ir vile wê.
dar nâch screib si A unde S.
do bereite sich diu mûder des
und sprach dô si in gelas
"hie stêt Ênêas!"
(10618–10630)

she took her tablet
and a stylus of gold,
with which she wanted to write.
Anxiously she smoothed the wax
to write 'Eneas',
since her mother had given her
permission.
E was the first letter,
after it N and then again E.
Her anguish pained her very much.
Then she wrote A and S.
Her mother inspected her writing
and said after reading it,
"This reads 'Eneas'!"[448]

At least to the modern reader, the scene is almost comical. Before Lavinia slowly draws every letter of her beloved's name so that her mother can display her impressive reading skills, the *Eneasroman* devotes considerable space to oral discourses on love. Mother and daughter sit together to talk about the best possible suitor, the physical signs of love and the painful pleasure of its impact for a total of 200 verses (9750–9968). The tablet scene, too, is preceded by a lengthy conversation between the two on *daz sûze ungemach* ("the sweet misery", 10532). In addition to these dialogues in which the queen imparts her wisdom in all matters of the heart, the text presents a soliloquy of an astonishing 400 verses that Lavinia *sprach* […] *ir selber jâmmerlîche zû* ("delivered to herself woefully", 10062) in an attempt to work out her feelings and thoughts after falling in love with Eneas at first sight.[449] Since she had previously given voice to complex philosophical issues debated with her mother and herself, why does Lavinia not simply speak Eneas's name out loud

when asked?

Rather than pronouncing her answer, the princess reaches for her writing materials, creating what Jane Bennett, with a nod to Deleuze/Guattari, describes as an "assemblage", a spontaneous grouping of material bodies, persons and things.[450] In an assemblage, agency is not the privilege of a single entity, but is distributed among the members of the association. While Lavinia guides the stylus, its golden tip incises the wax that forms the letters which Lavinia's mother, holding the tablet in her hands in turn, combines to proclaim her daughter's love for a foreigner. The writing surface offers itself as "a tablet of the heart" that materialises the object of Lavinia's desire. By revealing her secret, the inscription spells out the goal of the lesson the princess had been learning orally.

At the same time, the tablet demands a labour of Lavinia in return for concluding her quest for emotional knowledge. While the air that reverberates with spoken sounds offers no resistance, the materiality of the wax forces her to scratch away with her stylus, to displace matter. Lavinia must first smooth the wax (*plânete daz was*, 10621) and then incise the letters, which she does slowly and in agony (*angesten*, 10621; 10626). She knows that her mother will disapprove of her desire for Eneas and wishes her to marry the Italian prince Turnus instead. But as the princess toils over her inscription, the material conditions recall that the writer herself has undergone an equally exacting process. While a fierce war for the future rule of Latium was raging around her between the conquering Eneas and the defending Turnus, Lavinia, through her soliloquy and dialogues with her mother, managed to negotiate the pressures of politics and her personal wishes. What she sets down in writing with considerable effort is her female power of choice, catalysed by the interfering goddess of love, but carefully evaluated nonetheless.[451]

The significance of Lavinia's inscription on the tablet becomes especially clear when compared to another scene of the text in which a woman reveals her love for Eneas. When Dido, smitten with the Trojan hero after his arrival at Carthage, confides in her sister Anna that she is suffering from love for a man, Anna presses her to disclose who it is. Like Lavinia, Dido hesitates at first but finally relents. But rather than writing down the name of her beloved, Dido spells it out:

"her heizet", sprach si "der Ê	"he is called", she said, "E
und dar nâch NÊ." uber lank,	and then NE" hesitantly,
alsô sie diu minne dwank,	as Love forced her,

ê si vollesprâche AS (1530–1533)	before she concluded AS.

Dido's letter-by-letter revelation is echoed by Lavinia's equally slow, tortured inscription later, but also recalls the French version of the scene between the Italian princess and her mother. In the *Roman d'Eneas*, Lavinia does not write on her wax tablet, but spells out Eneas's name exactly as Dido does in Heinrich von Veldeke's German text. Heinrich, then, makes two changes to his French template: By having his Dido spell out orally and slowly, who in the French version simply pronounces Eneas's name (cf. 1322), and by making Lavinia incise her tablet, Heinrich sets his Italian princess apart.[452] As the *Eneasroman* transfers the utterance to Dido and parallelises the two scenes, Lavinia's inscription stresses the difference between her and the abandoned queen of Carthage: Lavinia's love for Eneas is not an idle fancy, but fate; it is written. Her union with the Trojan hero is not the hushed whisper of myth, but the inscribed certainty of history.

Lavinia's inscription certainly marks the beginning of a desire that, once communicated to her mother by tablet and then to her beloved by letter, is fulfilled. In the *Ovide moralisé*, in contrast, revealing one's tablet of the heart entails pain and calamity. The fourteenth-century French adaptation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* reworks the story of Byblis, whose disastrous love for her brother Cadmus makes her story a cautionary tale for all those ladies who need to "learn not to love too madly" (*prendere* / *Qu'eles n'aiment trop folement*, 2080f.). Like the *Eneasroman*, the *Ovide moralisé* probes the emotions and thoughts of the heroine much more thoroughly than its classical source. While Ovid's Byblis only raises objections to her incestuous passion to dismiss them curtly, her French counterpart first wrestles with her feelings in a lengthy soliloquy spoken by "her heart" (*son cuer*, 2114) before repeating her agony while incising a confession to her brother on her wax tablet.[453]

This act of writing aims to convince both Cadmus and Byblis herself that their love would be permissible, but ultimately activates an assemblage that cannot hold. Byblis's urgent inscription goes hand in hand with self-censorship. Drawing on the trope of the tablet of the heart, she makes clear that she considers such an inscription a special kind of communication:

"Et se je lais pour honte à dire, *Je li demanderai par cire,* *Savoir li ferai par escrit* *Ce que j'ai en mon cuer escrit"*	"And if I am too ashamed to say it, I will ask him by wax, I will let him know by writing What is written on my heart."

(9.2227–2230)

The rhyme *dire : cire* is ironic since the following verses reveal that Byblis's incising her tablet is anything but a straightforward process of enunciation. Saying something "by wax" (*par cire*) in her case implies a continued elimination of the writer's words. Byblis composes a few lines on her tablet, "deletes" them (*dapna*, 2246), starts afresh, "erases" again (*efface*, 2247) and again (2249), and "smooths" the wax (*aplaine*, 2249) only to "re-delete and blot out" (*redapne si l'efface*, 2257) twice more (2259), all "in great pain" (*en grant paine*, 2250). Her self-repression culminates in her decision to omit her own name and the identifier "sister" (*Seror*, 2254) from the letter addressed to her brother.

When consigning her letter to a messenger who is to carry it to Cadmus, Byblis drops the tablet on the floor, an event whose ominous connotations both she and the narrator note. This momentary disruption prefigures the action of Cadmus, who, having read the missive, "threw the inscription away in anger" (*L'escript gita par maltalent*, 2368). The tablet does not reappear after this, and in some versions of the story even breaks to pieces.[454] It seems that no entity that forms part of the love-letter-assemblage actually wants Byblis's petition to succeed. While the waxen surface prompts countless rewritings, the resulting palimpsest is still not a perfect, pleasing composition, but one tainted by excess, without space for even "one more verse" (*plus un vers*, 2341). What Byblis experiences is a kind of "un-desire" that insists on being materialised on the waxen tablet of the heart, but is rejected by both the horrified recipient and the doubting (*douteuse*, 2248) sender. Like dark energy, Byblis's un-desire is effective—inscribing itself on her tablet of the heart—but ultimately unattainable.

The text-bearing tablet not only functions as a letter to be discarded, but also allows the narrator to offer a different reading of Byblis as her story continues. After being rejected by Cadmus, Byblis decides to roam the world and offer her love freely to anyone who desires her before being turned into a fountain. While first condemning both Byblis's relations with her brother and with an indeterminate number of men as "whoredom" (*putage*, 2102; *puterie*, 2468), the moralising narrator offers a stunning reversal of his judgement of the heroine after her metamorphosis. He reinterprets the wandering Byblis as the epitome of virtue first drawn to, but then fleeing from the degenerate, sinful world that Cadmus represents. Whereas such an allegorisation is a common Christian strategy to deal with classical tales of incest,[455] the poet of the *Ovide moralisé* dares an

even bolder conceit. Recalling Byblis's text-bearing artefact, he invokes another assemblage that centres around a tablet: Moses, the Israelites and God's inscribed commandments. Lithic rather than waxen, the tablets of the law differ from Byblis's letter, but are close enough in type to allow for a blending. Speaking of the heroine, the narrator reminds us that she had engaged a messenger

Qui porta la table et l'escrit	who carried the tablet and the inscription
Ou ses secrez furenz escrit.	in which her secrets were spelled out.
Volt escrire o son propre doi	She/he wanted to write with her/his own finger
Les comandemens de la loi	The commandments of the law
Et trasmettre au peuple israël	And have them delivered to the Israelites
Par Moÿs, son sergant faël,	By Moses, his faithful servant,
Qui li presenta l'escripture	To whom he presented the inscription.
(2615–2621)	

The grammatical subject of the verb *volt escrire* is ambivalent, referring to both Byblis from the previous sentence and the God of the Old Testament story. Merging the heroine and God via their tablet-inscriptions enables the narrator to explain his surprising re-reading of Byblis's promiscuity as Christian virtue. Both God's commandments and the letter were works of loving zeal eventually rejected by their addressees. Spurned, both writers then go out into the world to "offer their love to all" (*Pour s'amour à tous presenter*, 2657).

As scholars have noted, the commentary that concludes the tales in the *Ovide moralisé* often contradicts the moral gist of the stories, here casting an incestuous, promiscuous woman as a God-like figure in a tale that was supposed to be a warning against foolish infatuation.[456] What we can learn from this striking association between Byblis and God, however, is that their *tertium comparationis*, the tablets, are a text-bearing artefact whose handy format caters to the extreme ends of the communicative spectrum. Tablets of the heart, as we have seen with Lavinia and Byblis, bear the private and emotional outpourings of the writer and verbalise what cannot be said. Handed from person to person, the waxen surface reveals secrets to the addressee in an assemblage with restricted members.

Stone tablets, in contrast, are bearers not of personal, but of communal memory. The codification of laws and socio-religious responsibilities on tablets is also Akkadian in origin. It left its most lasting imprint on Western culture in the form of the

"tablets of the law" in the Old Testament. Inscribed by God's finger on Mount Sinai and shattered by an angry Moses at the sight of the golden calf, the stone tablets are finally refashioned to bear the Ten Commandments and document the covenant between God and the Israelites.[457] As their format is associated with legal transactions and proclamations, tablets are also tasked with preserving the agreements and self-definitions that constitute a community. Depending on the materiality of their surface, then, tablets can communicate the doubtful propositions of an anguished lover *par cire* or the assured directions of a deity chiselled in stone. They may prescribe moral laws and carry furtive messages that seek to subvert them.

The Middle English *Canticum de Creatione* from the end of the fourteenth century and the prose *Life of Adam and Eve* from the fifteenth century recall both these configurations of tablets, the personal and the communal, in a single text-bearing artefact. The two texts form part of the apocryphal legends of Adam and Eve, a popular cluster of stories retelling the story of Genesis in more detail.[458] After their expulsion from paradise, the first couple performs a lengthy penitence before they are blessed with children, among them Cain, Abel and Seth. After many centuries, Adam dies, and Eve, too, must face her end. To add to this frightening prospect, she is also made aware that God intends to destroy all life on earth. Both the *Canticum* and the *Life* recount how Eve then instructs Seth to make sure his parents' memory survives the imminent end of the world:

"Take & make tables tweye	"Take and make two tablets
Of al oure lyf anon,	About all our life up to now,
Tweye of erthe & tweye of ston;	Two of clay and two of stone;
Writ theron oure lyf anon	Write on them our life up to now
That we have had here	That we have had here,
For longe er domesday falle	Because long before doomsday falls,
This worlde shel ben fordon alle,	This world will all be destroyed
By water or by fere,	By water or by fire.
Gif it be by water fordon,	If it be destroyed by water,
Thanne shollen the tables of ston	Then the tablets of stone shall
Lasten, withouten lye;	last, without lie;
Gif it thorghe fer be broght to nought,	If it be brought to nought by fire,
Thanne the tables of erthe wroght	Then the tablets made of clay
Lasten sikerly."	Will surely last."
(*Cant.*, 899–912)	

Carefully planning for a possible apocalypse by water and one by fire, Eve selects stone and clay, two materials that are inscribable and can withstand at least one of these calamities.[459] Seth is to make four tablets in total, two of each material, the double form

perhaps anticipating the diptych Moses receives. But the text he is to incise is not a set of laws, but a personal narrative of *al oure lyf anon* (900, 902). While this plural in the *Canticum* may include Adam, Eve and all their descendants up to this point, Seth receives more specific instructions in the *Life*. Here, Eve tells him to focus exclusively on *the lijf of youre fadir and of me, and tho thingis that yee han herd and seen of us* (*Life*, 97). As Sarah E. Novacich has shown, a number of late medieval narratives of Eden are concerned with archiving the details of a paradise lost.[460] The tablets that Eve commissions become a record that historicises this time of beginning. Facing death, the mother of mankind wishes for her biography to endure, to chronicle her and Adam's achievements for a post-cataclysmic world that may or may not have readers.

Indeed, both the *Canticum* and the *Life* grapple with questions of literacy and readability. While Seth does as he was bid, the texts make clear that he did not manage to inscribe the tablets on his own. Rather, *an angel held his hond right* (*Cant*., 949) or, more precisely, clasped the stylus (*an irun*, *Life*, 99) as the son of Eve was writing. Being only the medium, Seth consequently has no control over what he incises, with the result that the inscribed tablets eventually contain not only the biographies of Adam and Eve, but also *manye wonderful profecyes* (*Life*, 99). As the story of the beginning of humankind needed divine assistance to be written, it likewise requires an angelic intervention to be decoded. Although the tablets *were founden and seen of manye oon* after the Noachian flood, they were *not red* (*Life*, 99). When a puzzled King Solomon finally discovers them, he prays to God for understanding and is enlightened by the very same angel who had helped Seth to incise them. Having learned how the inscription came about, Solomon, now turned philologist, called *these lettris on these tablis Achiliacos, that is to seye, with-outen techyng of lyppis* (*Life*, 99).[461] What Seth has employed and Solomon decoded is a script "without lips", an alphabet that was never sounded, a text that defied death and destruction as pure writing. Making the antediluvian past readable offers insights into the life story of the first couple, but also reveals *that that was profecyed of Adam seven sythis* (*Life*, 99). With the help of the tablets, Solomon has uncovered not only biographical history, but also what it means.

Seth's assisted inscription links humanity's beginning to the wise King of Israel textually as well as locally. The place where Solomon found the tablets, the angel informs him, was exactly where Seth had deposited them, a location he had chosen because

Adam used to worship there. Miraculously, the text-bearing artefacts, while portable, were not dislodged by the flood. They mark a holy spot, where Solomon, encouraged by the angel, proceeds to build the temple of Jerusalem. Both the tablets and the place of worship that Adam and Solomon now share identify the two men as founding fathers at the beginnings of a cultural timeline interrupted by a period of sinfulness punished with the Deluge. While the endurance of the tablets suggests continuity, the *Canticum* and the *Life* also emphasise development. By linking Adam and Solomon, they narrate the evolution from a personal to a communal religion, from a private place of worship to the great temple of a nation.

As we have seen in the romances of Eneas and the *Ovide moralisé*, tablets are inscribed artefacts closely linked to the person that incises them, and come to materialise the writer's mind and heart. In the legends of Adam and Eve, in contrast, Seth, the person who inscribes the tablets, remains fairly unimportant, a mere channel for divine wisdom. Instead, the locostatic stone and clay slabs that bear the biography of the first couple come to reveal the local and material origins of Christianity. In the rest of this chapter, I will turn my attention to inscribed artefacts likewise fixed in a particular place and explore tablets used not for the intimate writing of the self, but fashioned as plaques attached to a surface visible to all passers-by.

I propose to think of such affixed tablets as "premodern post-its", material pieces of text joined to another object. Such an assemblage may serve to make the writing more visible, as in the case of a golden plaque screwed to a wooden coffin displaying the name of the deceased. Post-its also provide a way to attach writing to a surface whose own materiality cannot or must not bear it. Rather than scribbling in the margins of a book taken from the library, I stick a paper post-it in the same place to record my thoughts. This example also illustrates the most convenient quality of sticky notes, their removability. Developed in the 1970s as an alternative to conventional bookmarks, post-its owed much of their subsequent success to a unique type of glue powerful enough to ensure proper adhesion, but weak enough to allow an easy detachment without damaging the surface material.[462] While none of my following medieval examples of affixed tablets are actually removed, they still reveal the poetic possibilities of the inscribed post-it as a temporarily permanent piece of writing.

In Chaucer's *House of Fame* (c. 1380), the dreamer-narrator encounters a plaque attached to the wall of the temple of Venus that bears the beginning of Virgil's *Aeneid*. While the post-it is

clearly a *table of bras* (142), the walls are made of glass, which would explain why Virgil's verses are not inscribed directly onto the wall. In addition, writing on a wall carries the specific connotation of a prophetic warning. But there is, I believe, another reason why the text features Virgil on a post-it, a reason that is more closely connected to Chaucer's own literary ambitions. As the chapter on inscriptions in British literature in this volume argues, *The House of Fame* narrates Chaucer's questioning of the cultural *auctoritas* traditionally accorded to classical authors and his effort to present himself as a "public poet" who draws on contemporary, worldly experience rather than received wisdom.[463] Virgil's lines attached to, but not written on the temple walls, I would contend, gesture towards an anxiety of influence that is wary of literary models, yet knows how to transcend them.

By representing the echo of the *Aeneid* on a post-it, Chaucer gives material form to a single voice from the corpus of classical literature underpinning his poem. Singling out Virgil with a brass tablet, he creates an arrangement of the kind that Seeta Chaganti, writing in a different context, has described as "figure and ground". Borrowed from *Gestalttheorie* and then developed by fields such as media studies and art theory, the two terms describe a basic relationship in human perception. While some phenomena will be identified as an amorphous (back)ground, "certain shapes and hues dominate one's perceptual field to stand out as figures".[464] By inscribing Virgil on a material post-it, I would argue, Chaucer isolates one figure of *auctoritas* against the ground of the glass wall. This material foregrounding prepares the way for a poetic empowerment. In *The House of Fame*, classical *auctoritas* is not an all-encompassing horizon; turned into just a piece of writing, a scrap, even Virgil can be (sur)passed, his brass tablet dismounted from the wall or left behind as the dreamer moves on, and his poetry transcended by Chaucer the public poet. As a figure still attached to, but detached from the ground, the material post-it offers a way of confining a piece of writing to a limited space. Chaucer's dreamer uses the Virgilian lines to launch his own literary myth-making. He has the last word, while the tablet remains silent.

Used in a different context, but similarly related to hierarchies of power and speech, post-its also lend themselves to the textual practice of tagging. Affixing a material bit of writing to a person or a thing is an act of appropriation, of superimposing a voice that hijacks the person's or the thing's means of self-representation. Such a tagging may be performed with

benevolent intentions, as in case of plaques fastened to funerary monuments and bearing eulogies, of which medieval literature records a considerable number.[465] But, as the brass tablet in *The House of Fame* has shown, post-its bring power relations into play as their doubleness—text-bearing thing on thing, text-bearing material on material—reveals the agonistic nature of a supplement that both complements and undermines that to which it is attached. In order to explore inscribed tablets as tags, I will turn to possibly the most well-known post-it in Western literature, the *INRI* inscription.

All four gospels narrate how a nametag for Jesus is affixed to the cross on which he was crucified:

> *Postquam autem crucifixerunt eum diviserunt vestimenta eius sortem mittentes et sedentes servabant eum. Et inposuerunt super caput eius causam ipsium scriptam hic est Iesus rex Iudaeorum*. (Matt. 27:35–37)
>
> And after they had crucified him, they divided his garments, casting lots; [...]. And they sat and watched him. And they put over his head his cause written: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

The tablet positioned above Jesus's head identifies him, in contrast to the two also crucified but untagged thieves whose crosses, as the next sentence makes clear, were erected adjacent to Christ's. But the post-it does not simply record the name of the punished man, but also discloses his crime (*causam*) with the accusatory epithet "King of the Jews". Mark and Luke specify that the tag was "a superscription" (*titulus*, Mark 15:26; *superscriptio*, Luke 23:38), referring both to its spatial positioning and its function. To those who argued for Christ's crucifixion, the plaque represents a mark of triumph that aims to supersede Jesus's message by turning his own words against him in a performance of dramatic irony.

One of the gospels, however, also betrays an anxiety about potential misreadings of a post-it so publicly exhibited.

> *et baiulans sibi crucem exivit in eum qui dicitur Calvariae locum hebraice Golgotha ubi eum crucifixerunt et cum eo alios duos hinc et hinc medium autem Iesum. Scripsit autem et titulum Pilatus et posuit super crucem erat autem scriptum Iesus Nazarenus rex Iudaeorum. Hunc ergo titulum multi legerunt Iudaeorum quia prope civitatem erat locus ubi crucifixus est Iesus et erat scriptum hebraice graece et latine. Dicebant ergo Pilato pontifices Iudaeorum noli scribere rex Iudaeorum sed quia ipse dixit rex sum Iudaeorum. Respondit Pilatus quod scripsi scripsi*. (John 19:17–22)
>
> And bearing his own cross, he went forth to the place which is called Calvary, but in Hebrew Golgotha. Where they crucified him, and with him two others, one on each side, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title also: and he put it upon the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF

> NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title therefore many of the Jews did read: because the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city. And it was written in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate: Write not: The King of the Jews. But that he said: I am the King of the Jews. Pilate answered: What I have written, I have written.

John's account of the inscription differs from the one in the Synoptic Gospels in several key details. Here, it is Pontius Pilate who writes and places the post-it, rather than an unidentified group of people. The passage also records the reactions of the Jews, who fear that the epithet on the inscription might be taken as fact rather than as a mockery of Christ's pretension. To ensure that the irony and the Roman victory are not lost on readers, the Jews propose to signal that the voice of the plaque is Christ's, which would overwrite his self-representation with mimicked speech. Pilate's insistence on leaving the post-it as it is instead paves the way for a triumphant reading of Jesus's story, a reading in which written things come true.

One prominent refraction of the *INRI* inscription features in the fourteenth-century *Book of John Mandeville*, a travelogue that takes readers from Hungary to East Asia via the Holy Land. In the chapter entitled *A way to Ierusalem*, the text offers a detailed description of the holy cross. It is made of four different types of wood, each used for a specific purpose. While the beams are made of sweet-smelling cypress, undecaying cedar and palm signifying victory, *þe table abouen his heued* […] *on þe whilk þe tytle was writen* […] *was of olyue* (6.33–35) to signify the *pees* (7.12) the Jews had hoped would reign after the death of Jesus the trouble-maker. Not only the materiality of the plaque is explicated; the narrator also describes its precise measurements (*a fote and a halfe long*, 6.33f.) in an attempt at verisimilitude. Stopping at this moment on Cyprus, he has good reason to emphasise the physical uniqueness of the true cross, contrasting it with a false relic that the Cypriots currently worship on their island. Christ's cross and post-it are portrayed *en passant*, the details furnished by textual memory rather than autopsy.

When Mandeville's narrator eventually gets to Jerusalem, the true cross is not there either, having been excavated, as we learn, by Constantine and Helena. Still, the holy place is visibly marked by the sacred history that took place there. The particular spot on Golgotha where Christ gave up his spirit is still bleeding (42) and the narrator records two inscriptions, on *þare whare oure lord was done on þe crosse* (42.27), proclaiming Jesus has worked salvation in this very place, and one *apon þe roche whare þe*

crosse was ficched (42.33), identifying that spot as *þe ground of alle þe fayth* (42.36f.). In contrast to the *INRI* epithet, these inscriptions are not incised on tablets, but engraved in the very landscape. The cross and nails have been recovered, whereas the plaque bearing Christ's name never resurfaced.[466] Instead, the textuality that accompanied the crucifixion has permeated the physical surroundings, where it now illustrates the paradox of temporary permanence. While the post-it itself, material but attached only flimsily, is gone, the message has endured, now inscribed into the very ground itself.

The text-bearing artefact that medieval texts call "tablet", then, is multifaceted, encompassing both the private and the public, the ephemeral and the eternal. As personal writing companions, tablets allow courtly women to process and communicate their emotions and desires in wax, the substance most tolerant of doubts. At the same time, their format evokes divine statutes whose materiality connects Adam and Solomon, and Dido and Lavinia. Tablets easily break when thrown in anger by a brother disgusted at the suggestion of incest, yet survive the first end of the world and testify to how it all began. Posted onto walls and crosses, they generate an agon of voices. New poetry can set itself off as inspired by, but now separate from, the old. And even at the death of Christ, a post-it creates an assemblage in which the inscribed figure seeks but fails to eclipse the silent ground.

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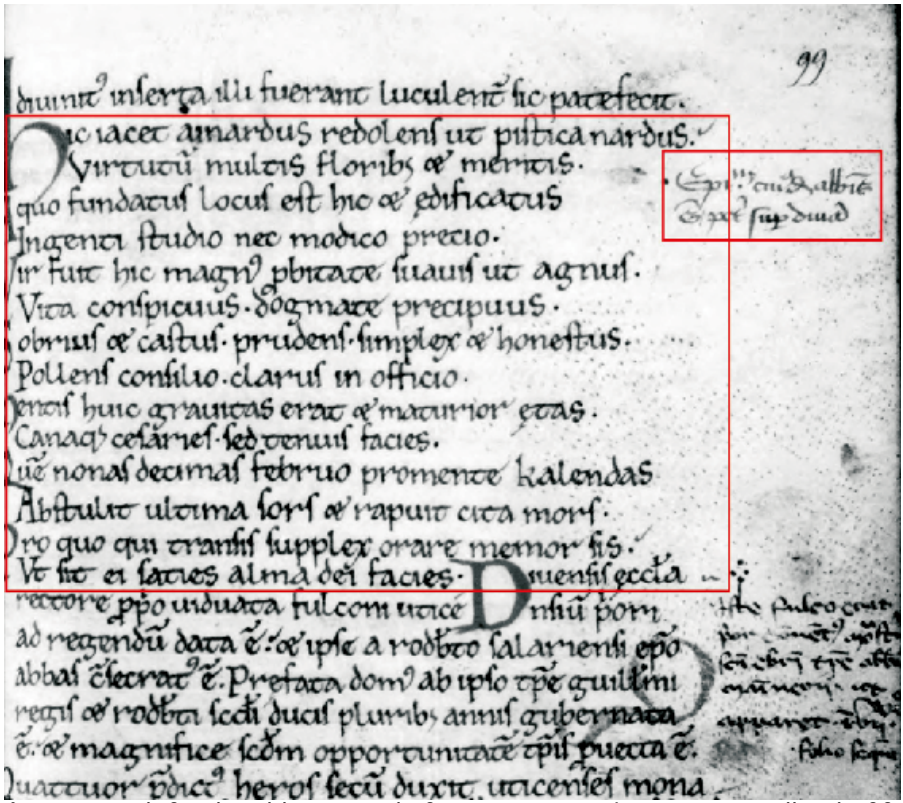

Fig. 1: Epitaph for the Abbot Ainard of Dive in *Hist. Eccl*. IV. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. Latin 5506 (2), vue 100.

Sepulchral Representation: Inscribed Tombs and Narrated Epitaphs in the High Middle Ages

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Compared with other cultural techniques of *memoria*, the tomb’s distinctive feature is its metonymic form of representation. As a sign it is always locally bound to what it designates; it indicates the proximity of what it stands for. Thus, its symbolic nature oscillates between the necessary absence and suggestive

visualisation of the dead body: the tomb stands where the subject is no longer. This process of representation can be supported by various rhetorical strategies. They include the "epitaphic voice" in the first person (*prosopopoeia*) and deictic expressions, such as the prominent sepulchral formula *hic situs est*, both of which create the illusion that they establish physical contact with the past.[467] Hence, the tomb belongs to the semiotic paradigm of *quid pro quo*, aiming to make the deceased appear spatially present.

Semiotic manifestations of tombs are undoubtedly historically variable.[468] Starting in the tenth century, there was a gradual change in the way death was dealt with, which is reflected in the tombs designed for spiritual and secular princes, and can be described as an increasing need for individualisation.[469] This trend includes the development of tomb sculptures from flat carved images to life-size sculptures and the "return" of tomb inscriptions.[470] In the early Middle Ages, nameless tombs had largely been the norm. Then, between the tenth and twelfth centuries, epitaphs began to contain short identifications, primarily the deceased's name, state and date of death. While epitaphs of the high Middle Ages could sometimes also contain a prayer for the soul of the deceased, it was not until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that epitaphs increasingly gained scope and eloquence.[471]

The dissemination of sepulchral as well as other inscriptions correlates with the progressive rise of literacy in Europe, which was driven by the aristocratic courts and gradually spread to the cities, where the new necessity for literacy informed lay schools and administrative apparatuses. It is therefore no coincidence that between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, historiography and literature began to reflect on the social functions and semiotic modes of sepulchral representation, placing tombs at the centre of an emerging discourse. In the following chapter, I shall concentrate on three pivotal examples from this time to address how they imagine the material designs of text and image on a monument in order to shape the commemoration of the dead: first, the monumental historical work *Historia Ecclesiastica* of the Norman Benedictine monk Orderic Vitalis (1075–c. 1142), second, the *Alexandreis* by learned author Walter von Châtillon (c. 1135–c. 1190), and last, the German translation of the French *Prose Lancelot* (c. 1215–c. 1230). These three texts were widely transmitted and broadly received during the Middle Ages and can therefore be considered representative of the contemporary sepulchral discourse.

I

Despite its fundamental focus on the past, ever since Isidore of Seville medieval historiography largely attaches importance to the present and, thus, to what can be empirically verifiable. In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore demands that historians should trust their own eyes rather than what has been told to them.[472] Orderic Vitalis similarly commits himself to the task of recording personally experienced and observed events for later generations in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*:[473]

> *Non arte litteratoria fultus, nec scientia nec facundia preditus: sed bonae uoluntatis intentione prouocatus* ***appeto nunc dictare de his quae uidemus seu toleramus****. Decet utique ut sicut nouae res mundo cotidie accidunt, sic ad laudem Dei assidue scripto tradantur, et sicut ab anterioribus preterita gesta usque ad nos transmissa sunt: sic etiam presentia nunc a presentibus futurae posteritati litterarum notamine transmittantur*. (I, 130f., my emphasis)

> Now, equipped with no literary skill to support me and endowed with neither knowledge nor eloquence, but inspired by the best intentions, **I set about composing an account of the events which we witness and endure.** It is fitting that, since new events take place every day in this world, they should be systematically committed to writing to the glory of God, so that—just as past deeds have been handed down by our forebears present happenings should be recorded now and passed on by the men of today to future generations.

Despite the commitment, formulated in the preface, to keep the *presentia* central in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Orderic expands his history of the Benedictine abbey of St Évroul, initially ordered by Prior Roger (1096–1123), into successively wider contexts, producing a monumental history of the land and church of the Normans. Finally, he sets two books on the early history of the church at the beginning, describing all apostles, evangelists and the vitae of popes (apart from Leo IV), so that the continuously growing presentation corresponds more and more to a universal church history. A particular formal feature of his thirteen-volume historical work is the creation of narratives that also feature various embedded poetic additions. Among these are a total of 37 quoted epitaphs (referred to as *carmen*, *versus*, *elogium*, *epilogum* and often also as *epitaphium*), which begin in Book Four and noticeably accumulate in Books Five, Eight and Eleven.[474] The epitaphs of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* are dedicated to both secular and ecclesiastical leaders and, apart from one exception, are written in the Elegiac Distichon or in Leonine Hexameter. A substantial part of the epitaphs (altogether 27) deal explicitly with

inscriptions on gravestones. The others feature funeral poetry, which was possibly composed for the burial ceremony or the anniversary of the subject's death.

The first epitaph is found at the beginning of Book Four after the description of the coronation of William I as king of England (at the end of Book Three) and praise for the king's reforms and monastic foundations. In 1067, it is said that William spent Easter at the Benedictine abbey at La Trinité de Fécamp. The ceremony is led by Maurilius, archbishop of Rouen, who dies shortly thereafter. But instead of relaying the archbishop's historical significance for the cooperation of secular and ecclesiastical powers in the struggle for the reformation of the church, Orderic describes his gravestone at the Cathedral of Rouen. He cites the elegiac epitaph verbatim with a detailed statement about its author. The description gives a deictic reference to the church (*hanc aedem*), which Maurilius once consecrated and in which his body is now entombed:

Epitaphium autem eius a Ricardo Herluini filio eiusdem aecclesiae canonico editum est. et super ipsum in cupri laminis ex auro sic scriptum est:	His epitaph was composed by Richard son of Herluin, canon of Rouen cathedral, and inscribed above his tomb in gold letters on bronze plates. It runs thus:
"Humani ciues lacrimam nolite negare	"O mortal men, do not deny a tear
Vestro pontifici Maurilio monacho.	For Maurille, monk and bishop, buried here;
Hunc Remis genuit, studiorum Legia nutrix	Nurtured by Rheims and schooled by Liège, he
Potauit trifido fonte philosophico.	Drank from the triple fount philosophy.
*Vobis **hanc aedem** ceptam perduxit ad unguem,*	For you **this fair cathedral**, new begun
Laetitia magna fecit et encenia.	He raised, and gave glad benediction.
Cum tibi Laurenti uigilat plebs sobria Christi.	Then Laurence, on thy holy vigil, he
Transit, et in coelis laurea festa colit."	Passed into heaven to keep thy feast with
(IV, 198f., my emphasis)	thee."

The prominent break between prose and verse can be explained by the literary tradition of the high Middle Ages. In the twelfth century, grave poetry was a widespread phenomenon, which, apart from the inscription of gravestones and tomb slabs in monastic contexts, is particularly related to the circulation of mortuary rolls.[475] In addition to influential northern French poets such as Baudri of Bourgueil or Fulcoius of Beauvais, of whom whole collections of epitaphs and epigrams are known, historians preceding and contemporaneous with Orderic made use of

epigraphic implements: first and foremost Bede, who is mentioned by Orderic in the preface of his first book as role model.[476] The history of the Normans by annalist Dudo of Saint-Quentin is also distinguished by a prosimetrical style of composition.[477] Likewise, the Anglo-Norman historian Henry of Huntingdon (c. 1088–1157) added nine epitaphs to his *Historia Anglorum*, eight of which are attributed to his own writing.[478]

Unlike these named historical works, epitaphs in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* are not merely used to emphatically praise particular figures of the past but rather are important features in Orderic's visualisation program. Already the fact that epitaphs are only first featured in Book Four (which reports events starting in 1067) and increase in the following Book Five (which coincides with the year of Orderic's birth, 1075),[479] suggests that Orderic concentrates completely on the *memoria* of the dead from his own time. In addition, the amount of epitaphic parentheses in Orderic's text in comparison to his predecessors and contemporaries is drastically different. It seems that Orderic wishes thereby to provide a comprehensive "collection of sources" of his own time for his future readers.

The accuracy of Orderic's gravestone descriptions attests to his role as a historian of his time. He meticulously analyses the use of materials (stone, bronze, gold, gemstones, etc.), colours (the gravestones are partly painted) and forms (plates, bows, memorial, etc.) of each tomb, as well as giving precise information on spatial locations. In a number of instances, he specifies a gravestone's condition at the present, thus clearly announcing his role as a contemporary eyewitness. This is particularly the case with graves at or around St Évroul, such as the description of the grave of Robert of Rhuddlan, whose bones were moved to St Évroul through his brother's efforts. Orderic composed the exceptionally long epitaph (44 verses) himself:

> *Eiusque studio conditus super tumulum fratris sui lapideus arcus* ***usque hodie consistit****. Rainaldus pictor cognomento Bartholomeus uariis coloribus arcum tumulumque depinxit. et Vitalis angligena satis ab Ernaldo rogatus epitaphium elegiacis uersibus hoc modo edidit·*
>
> Thanks to his endeavours a stone arch was erected over the tomb of his brother, **where it stands to this day.** Reginald called Bartholomew, a painter, painted the arch and tomb in different colours, and the Englishman Vitalis, at Arnold's earnest request, composed this epitaph in elegiac verse:
>
> *"Hoc in mausoleo Robertus de Rodelento*
> *Conditur humano more soli gremio […].*"
> "Here in this tomb Robert of Rhuddlan lies […]".
>
> (VIII, 142 ff., my emphasis)

In the description of the gravestone of Matilda, Queen of England, however, the date of death in the narrator's commentary differs from the actual epitaph:

> […] [Mathildis regina Anglorum] ***iii°*** […] [Matilda, queen of England] died ***non' Nouembris*** *obiit. Deinde corpus* **on 3 November.** Her body was *eius ad coenobium sanctae Trinitatis* carried at once to the abbey of the *quod ipsa sanctimonialibus apud* Holy Trinity, which she had founded *Cadomum construxerat delatum est. et* at Caen for nuns, and was reverently *ab episcopis ac abbatibus multis inter* buried by many bishops and abbots *chorum et altare uenerabiliter* between the choir and the altar. […] A *tumulatum est.* […] *Memoriale eius* monument was erected over her, *super ipsam ex auro et gemmis* wonderfully worked with gold and *mirifice constructum est. et* precious stones, and this epitaph was *epitaphium huiusmodi litteris aureis* lovingly engraved in letters of gold: *comiter exaratum est.*
>
> *"Egregie pulchri tegit haec structura sepulchri,* "The lofty structure of this splendid tomb
> *Moribus insignem germen regale Mathildem.* Hides great Matilda, sprung from royal stem;
> […] *Sic infinitae petiit consortia uitae,* […] At daybreak **on November's second day**
> *In prima* ***mensis post primam*** *luce* ***Novembris.*** She won her share of everlasting joy."
>
> (VII, 44, my emphasis)

While the introduction mentions that Matilda died on November 3rd, the epitaph correctly dates her death to November 2nd. It is possible that Matilda's day of remembrance was set at St Évroul on November third.[480] But it is still remarkable that despite the discrepancy a correct citation was given in the epitaph. Thus, the tomb inscription as cited by Orderic still matches the wording of the real inscription on the gravestone, which can be visited to this day at the Norman monastic church Sainte-Trinité in Caen.

Apart from proving Orderic's historical accuracy, epitaphs clearly act as 'texts within a text' in terms of manuscript layout. Three autographs of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which are stored today in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, indicate that a marker on the textual surface was indeed intended.[481] The autographs are distinguished by intensive marginal glossing, which in most cases feature summaries of the main text.[482] Additionally, initials of different sizes act as markers of units of meaning. An examination of them demonstrates that cited epitaphs fulfil a clear segmentation function on the textual surface for the autobiographical Books Three to Six. Regardless if they are mentioned on gravestones or noted otherwise, all cited tomb inscriptions are highlighted in the manuscripts through initials at the beginning of a verse, marginalia and/or are

emphasised by a lavish ragged margin.[483]

Epitaphs are not only distinguished from the justified, continuing prose text through (mostly vertically) arranged initials on the left (or, in Elegiac Distichon, by the hanging pentameter). They are also marked as poetical insertions at the border of the page with the indication *epitaphium*/*epita*^{m}/*epi*^{m} + name (+ standing/origin/monastic affiliation) of the deceased. Once a verse begins in a new line, the right side features an open alignment, which visually supports the logic of the text. Even if a few of the epitaphs differ from this scheme and are put into the main text instead (possibly due to economic reasons), the verse initials and the gloss remain the same in these epitaphs.[484] The rhythmic and generic break is thus also accompanied by a visual turning point, which supports the increased visibility of the epitaphs. In such a way, the scribal tradition can contribute to the sensory experience of remembrance for those recipients that are spatially and temporally separated from the (initial) *memoria* of the dead.

According to Debiais and Ingrand-Varenne, the implementation of grave poetry initiates a change in the voice, adding a "polyphony" to the work.[485] It should be noted, however, that this polyphony is carefully arranged, not only because the author has made a selection of poetic insertions in advance, but also because he has remarkably often cited his *own* poetry (of the thirty-seven grave inscriptions nine are self-citations). With a quarter of the "voices", Orderic thus also dominates the polyphony of these poetic passages. I would therefore assume that the insertions merely aim at underlining historical authenticity on the one hand, and at creating a certain kind of presentness on the other, which emerges both through the guided viewing and reading of the manuscript, as well as in rhythmic speaking and hearing. The description of sepulchral arrangements thereby let (extratextual) recipients and (intertextual) deceased persons enter into a close relationship for a short time, constituted by the suggestion of a spatial-material constant.

II

Detailed descriptions of sepulchral arrangements can also be found in literary texts, especially in medieval renarrations of ancient subject matter. The reappraisal of topics taken from antiquity goes hand in hand with the appropriation of ancient rhetorical forms of representation such as *ekphrasis*, the verbal

representation of visual objects of art. Here a special attention is given to the material state of the world of things. Hermeneutic recognition and sensual experience are created as two possible modes of reception in the texts and are controlled by the commentary of an authorial narrator.

The great epic, *Alexandreis*, by Walter of Châtillon (c. 1170) is here taken as an example, since it features several elaborately staged gravestones.[486] The *Alexandreis* was passed down in over 175 manuscripts (half of which date to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) and immediately received commentary. In only a few centuries, the *Alexandreis* was promoted to be read in schools and could even replace the classics of grammar instruction, Vergil and Lucan (whose epics are at the same time important subtexts to the *Alexandreis*).[487] In the following, I will demonstrate that the detailed descriptions of heroes' graves reflect an epoch-specific *chronotopos*. The interlocking features of a hero's time and an eschatologically dimensional world time in the novel are made visible by way of these descriptions.

A total of four gravestones are described in the course of the narrative, in which the *translatio imperii* from the kingdom of Babylon to the Persians up to Hellenism is made visible. (1) In the first book, Alexander finds the grave of his heroic model Achilles (cf. 1, 468–538) whose inscription is phrased in the first person and in an archaic style. (2) In the fourth and seventh book, Alexander becomes himself a benefactor of two gravestones: first for the Persian Queen Stateira (cf. 4, 176–274), and then (3) for the fallen Persian King Darius (cf. 7, 379–430). The detailed descriptions of these two graves effect lengthy breaks in the story's events.[488] Both graves are connected to a description of the shield of King Darius (cf. 2, 494–539), which depicts the story of the Persian people. The genealogy of the Babylonian-Persian rule is gradually expanded and completed through the descriptions of the gravestones of the royal couple. The transition from the shield to the gravestone indicates that the symbolic claim to power attached to the armaments of Darius can no longer hold without restriction. Instead, the description of the tombs thematically foregrounds the transition of sovereignty. At the same time, Old Testament motifs relate the graves to Daniel's prophecy of the four world empires, to which the epic refers repeatedly.[489] In this way, the victory of Alexander over the Persians is placed into an eschatological perspective, and the proportions of the divine plan for salvation are laid before the characters—in almost a museal way—through picture and text. This happens in two steps: at first, the temporal expansion of the history of salvation is visualised at

Stateira's gravestone, which depicts the happenings *before* the Persian rule (since the creation of the world out of chaos), and is placed in relation to the New Testament by quotations of Old Testament prophets. Then, the history of humankind is laid out spatially as a *mappa mundi* on the second gravestone of Darius. (4) Finally, Alexander's own tombstone is mentioned in the tenth book of the *Alexandreis*, which is given less space than the other gravestones and is neither embellished with scripture nor decorated.

The gravestones of Achilles and King Darius in the *Alexandreis* illustrate which medial and material techniques ensured posthumous fame. In contrast to the prosopopoietic epitaph of Achilles, the epitaph of Darius's grave specifically focusses on the extratextual recipient. The reader can interpret and capture the meaning of the depiction (that is the entanglement of temporal and spatial semantics) due to an advantage in knowledge, while the figures within the diegeses are dependent on their sensual experience. On arrival in Asia, Alexander starts to search for traces of heroic prehistory (1, 457: *uetustatis saltim uestigia querit*). As he walks, he reencounters the course of events in the Trojan War and thus creates in the reader's mind's eye the legendary foil by which his own claim to posthumous heroic fame is subsequently negotiated. At the edge of a river, he first encounters a poplar tree with words carved into its bark (though they are not cited directly). They recall the love of the Trojan prince Paris for the nymph Oenone in a peaceful time before the great war between Orient and Occident.[490] Similar to a landmark, the poplar tree signals to Alexander that he has entered a historic landscape. He continues on his exploration and—from the forest—reaches the valley in which the judicial decision regarding Paris was made. From there, he arrives at the legendary ruined castle Ilions. After moving through several locations, Alexander reaches the former battlefield, which is dotted with heroes' graves. Only there, as he views the grave of Achilles, does the report become more detailed, bringing narrated and narrative time together. The grave of Achilles is the only one which features a directly cited inscription. The epitaph (*epygrammata*) is recounted by a first-person narrator, who even in death still claims heroic agency:[491]

Tot bellatorum Macedo dum busta pererrat
Argolicos inter cineres manesque sepultos,
Quos tamen accusant titulis epygrammata

As thus the Macedonian slowly wandered among so many tombs of Argive warriors, their buried shades and ashes, whom inscriptions still gave their titles clearly carved, behold! He saw Achilles's tomb, of lesser

certis,
Ecce minora loco quam fama uidit Achillis
Forte sepulchra sui tali distincta sigillo:
"Hectoris Eacides domitor clam incautus
inermis
Occubui, Paridis traiectus arundine plantas."
(1, 468–474)

breadth than fame, adorned with verses such as these: "Aeacus son Hectors slayer I fell unarmed unwary in a hidden spot pierced through theheel by Paris's stealthy dart."

The grave mound of Achilles is so small and unremarkable that Alexander only finds it by accident (*forte*). Instead of a heroic memorial, rising from the mass of those fallen warriors buried before Troy, the mound of Achilles disappears inconspicuously in the Iliadic funerary landscape. Only the prosopopoietic inscription bears witness to the notorious wrath of the hero, the conqueror of Hector, who laments posthumously about his own disgraceful and treacherous murder. Achilles may have fallen, but due to the inscription's first-person narration, he is able to borrow the voices of the passers-by to ensure the continuation of his own *memoria*.[492] Nevertheless, since Alexander only finds the grave incidentally—the grave as a material presence is hardly noticeable—the effectiveness of this strategy is questionable.

While the anecdote of Alexander's visit to the grave of Achilles was popular in antiquity (and late antiquity), it does not usually contain an epitaph. It featured, rather, a lament by the Macedonian king—also in the *Alexandreis*—about Achilles's good fortune that the great Homer recorded his heroic deeds and thus gave him eternal fame:[493]

[…] *summum tamen illud honoris*
Arbitror augmentum, quod tantum tantus
habere
Post obitum meruit preconem laudis Homerum.
O utinam nostros resoluto corpore tantis
Laudibus attollat non invidia fama tryumphos!
(1, 481–485)

[…] and yet this is the highest increase to his honor—or so I judge—that such a man in death should merit such a herald of his praise asHomer. Would that Fame, unenvious, should sing, when we are dead, such songs of praise!

In Alexander's exclamation, the sparse epitaph is contrasted with the eternal glory of the hero in the Homeric *Iliad*. The visit to Troy and the lament at the grave of Achilles thus offer not only a review of bygone events, but also contemplate human limitations and strategies of perpetuation. In his dialogue with the Greek

hero, to whom Alexander lends his voice, the king realises that a hero is always dependent on the memory of his progeny. The simplicity of the gravestone is not the actual focus, but rather Alexander's fear that there is no Homer to remember his deeds and that future generations may even regard them adversely. While a spatially-bound inscription—the materially solidified traces (*uestigia*) on wood and stone—may indeed protect and certify the memoria, an epically-transmitted fame (*fama*) can effectively disseminate and sublimate the deeds.

The character's discourse suggests that the narrator would like to be understood as a "second Homer", who is able to artfully present and elaborate the knowledge of the past.[494] For medieval audiences, the two characters, Achilles and Alexander, belong to a heroic prehistory and have recently become part of cultural memory. Unaware of his later *fama* and anxious about his posthumous legacy, Alexander's description creates a performative contradiction on the level of narration. After all, the story of Alexander's lament is embedded in a comprehensive medieval verse epic, which indeed remembers his deeds—but the character himself cannot know about this.

The other descriptions of graves in the *Alexandreis* differ from the first as they are extended to include detailed and visually appealing *descriptiones* for which no classical templates exist. After long-lasting military conflicts, the Persian King Darius is finally betrayed and killed by his own followers. Alexander, however, wishes to grant his nemesis his last request for perpetuation because, as he himself proclaims after he finds his fallen enemy in a ravine near to Ecbatana, the only one hope for luckless humans is that fame knows no death and a name can live on forever (cf. 7, 355–358). Darius's tomb, like Stateira's, is designed by the legendary sculptor Apelles. It is a pyramid of snow-white marble (7, 383: *Pyramis* […] *niueo que structa*) whose exterior joints are elegantly concealed with lustrous red gold (cf. 7, 387f.). Around the pyramid stand four pillars, partly made of gold and silver (cf. 7, 389–396), which carry a dome depicting the regions of Asia, Africa and Europe. The narrative recounts that the vault is more transparent than glass (7, 394: *lucidior uitro*), cleaner than calmed water (ibid.: *pacato purior amne*) and similar to a crystal (7, 395: *Crystallo similis*). At the same time, the whole earth with all its rivers, cities, mountains and the sea is represented on the vault (cf. 7, 398–403). All nations and peoples of the earth are portrayed, such as the ivory- and gemstone-rich India, Africa with its Carthaginian castle, Greece and Rome, as well as the Frankish realm with its great army and the famous

wine of Champagne (cf. 7, 404–414). Then the narrator goes on to describe the three continents of the earth, organised as a T-O map: Asia, Europe and Africa are surrounded by the ocean, with the Mediterranean Sea forming a hinge between the three regions (cf. 7, 414–420). This gleaming dome also contains an inscription:

Et quia non latuit sensus Danielis Apellem,
Aurea signauit epigrammate marmora tali:
"Hic situs est typicus aries, duo cornua cuius
Fregit Alexander, totius malleus orbis."
Preterea Hebreos et eorum scripta secutus,
Preteriti serie reuoluta temporis, annos
Humani generis a condicione notauit
Vsque triumphantis ad bellica tempora Magni.
In summa annorum bis milia bina leguntur
Bisque quadringenti decies sex bisque quaterni.
(7, 421–430)

And since Apelles was not ignorant of Daniel's meaning, with this epigram he marked the stones: "Here lies the figured ram whose double horns Great Alexander broke hammer of all the world." Then, following the Hebrews and their Scriptures, he set down the years of humankind from its creation, how all the sequence of past times revolved until the warlike Great One's victories. The sum of years were read thus: twice two thousand, four hundred twice, six tens, and still twice four.

The question about a guarantee for earthly posthumous glory, which was first raised at the inconspicuous gravestone of Achilles, is taken up again and answered differently here, offering not a written tradition (a Homeric epic) but a magnificently composed "trace". With this architectonically striking monument Alexander wants to preserve the *fama* of his enemy (cf. 7, 358). While the exclusive and diaphanous materials, arranged in geometric patterns, sublimate the Persian king's legacy, the placement of his burial ground beneath the domed roof universalises his earthly glory.

The cartographical system appearing on the dome adapts ancient and medieval knowledge in image and text. A directly cited sepulchral epigram follows this detailed description, along with a note through which Apelles injects the history of the Jews (as on the gravestone of Stateira): the Old Testament knowledge of the creation of the world, the history of the people of Israel and the Babylonian-Persian succession are once again recounted (*serie reuoluta*) and dated. In such presentations, many biblical events are exactly measured and related in both spatial and temporal terms. Even though he acts as founder and patron, Alexander is excluded from the biblical knowledge displayed on

the sepulchral monument, according to which the third empire has just begun with Alexander's succession from Darius. Medieval readers, however, must have easily grasped the meaning through the textual allusions and their knowledge of the four kingdoms of Daniel.[495]

Alexander's initial intention to ensure the posthumous fame of the Persian King is, however, contradicted by the fact that the *name* Darius appears nowhere on the gravestone. The epitaph instead verifies the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy: Alexander receives the *epitheton* "Hammer of the Whole World", which is said to have destroyed the horns of the buried ram.[496] The tomb thus does not act primarily as an exhibition space for the deeds of Darius, but as a representation of him as the last ruler of a dynasty terminated by Alexander. Therefore, the function of the monument vacillates between being a grave and a victory monument, designating the historical moment of the *translatio imperii* and, simultaneously, the climax of Alexander's own life.[497]

The epitomisation of the history of salvation, which gradually unfolds on the gravestones, is a reminder that it is not the worldly fame of a hero that is at the heart of the memorial visualisation, but the hero's role in the course of universal history. Instead of an archaic first-person inscription, Alexander has Apelles create a fantastic sculpture embellished by precious materials for the Persian, which reveals a characteristically medieval aesthetic form. The recipient is no longer led only by the inscription, but also, specifically, by an image sequence. The deictic epitaph, however, provides a key to a hermeneutic infiltration of the art program, which none of the characters within the diegesis are able to understand completely.

III

No romance from the high Middle Ages contains more tombs and epitaphs than the comprehensive anonymous *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* (1215–1230). The trilogy, called the *Prose Lancelot*, consists at its core of three parts, *Lancelot Propre*, *Queste del Saint Graal* and *Mort Artu*, which combine courtly, historiographical and religious patterns of narration. In this section, I will argue that tombs in the *Prose Lancelot* fulfill primarily a narrative function in the *entrelacement* of the story, and that this function is based both on their materiality and on the prompting nature of their inscriptions. Even though the first complete manuscript of the German *Prosa Lancelot* dates back to the fifteenth century, it

translates the medieval French model quite accurately, so the phenomena discussed in the following section can be considered as exemplary for the medieval Lancelot corpus more generally.[498]

Scholars have pointed out early on that tombs run like a common thread through the narrative world of the *Prose Lancelot*, unfolding a monumental ensemble to time and space.[499] The repetition and continuous variation of the tomb motif creates coherence on the *discourse*-level,[500] but it might also contribute to the conveyance of meaning on the *histoire*-level. However, this is complicated both by the tombs' fantastical character, which must have confused contemporary readers accustomed to real world tombs,[501] and by the mystification which they exert on the protagonists reading them within the narrative. This mystification is based on two characteristics: the fact that tombs always prompt what in Middle High German is referred to as *aventiure* and the fact that tomb inscriptions are proleptic, prophesying events that will only occur later in the story.

Aventiure is the guiding principle of the Knights of the Round Table. Time after time the heroes set out to prove their strength in competitions and to fight for law and order in the kingdom. They are often confronted with anonymous signs that claim authoritative validity: in addition to letters, signposts and inscribed weapons, tombs are among the objects of the narrative world which promise the knights *aventiure*, thus motivating the course of action in the story. At each cyclic return to Camelot, Arthur asks the knights to give a detailed report—following the historiographical principle of eyewitness testimony—which is then recorded by learned writers at court. Compared with other Arthurian romances, the *Prosa Lancelot* stresses the significance of literacy, placing reading, writing and interpreting at the centre of the heroic system of trial and triumph.

In *Lancelot Propre*, tombs not only act as *memoria* but also prophesise future events.[502] Therefore, they often feature two epitaphs, one on the outside, which indicates the arrival of a destined knight who alone will be able to open the tomb and thus distinguish himself from all others, and additionally one on the inside, which provides information about the entombed body. The tombs are guarded by characters from the religious world, carriers of historical and legendary knowledge. Sometimes they even "replace" the exterior epitaph by giving instructions to open the graves. However, their main function seems to consist of supervising the grave opening and leading the knight to the correct interpretation of the tomb and corpse.[503]

Lancelot, protagonist of the first part of the romance, succeeds

in opening some graves and thereby reveals the prehistory of his own kinship. He gradually discovers the tombs of his ancestors Galaad I and Simeu (son and nephew of Joseph of Arimathea respectively), of his friend Galahot and, finally, of Lancelot I, his grandfather. However, the series of tomb adventures begins with the discovery of his *own* name, which is hidden under a coffin lid in the cemetery of the *Dolorose Garde*.[504] His first adventure profiles not only the thematic nexus of tomb, identity and genealogy, which then determines the grave adventures in *Lancelot Propre*, but it also demonstrates the deceptive potential of writing by new, unauthorised scribes. When Lancelot arrives at the cemetery of the enchanted castle *Dolorose Garde*, he spots a tomb that differs from the others because of its material design and enigmatic inscription:[505]

> […] *der was groß und schwere und wúnderlich gewurckt mit golde und mit herlichem gesteyn. Er was aller mit buchstabe gemacht, die sprachen: "Dißer sargk enmag nymer von mannes hant off gehaben werden, wedder mit gewalt noch anders, es thú dann der der dißе jemerliche burg sol gewinnen und des name ste hieunden geschriben."* (*LuGin* I, 452, 20–26)
>
> In the middle of the graveyard lay a large slab of metal extraordinarily crafted in gold and stones and enamels, which bore words that said, "This slab will never be raised by hand or strength of man, save by the one who will win this woeful castle and whose name is engraved underneath."[506]

The narrator explains that many have already tried with strength and brains to open the coffin lid, above all the lord of the castle, who strongly wishes to find out the name of his last opponent; but so far nobody has succeeded. It remains unclear, though, who might have composed the epitaph. Fearlessly, Lancelot lifts the lid and finds another inscription underneath:

> *In dißem grab sol Lancelot ligen von dem Lacke, des kóniges Banes son von Bonewig und Alennen synes wibes."Er leyt den sargk wiedder nyder und wust wol das syn name was den er funden hett."* (*LuGin* I, 454, 4–7)
>
> Then he saw the words that said, "Here will lie Lancelot of the Lake, son of King Ban of Benoic." He let the slab down again, knowing that it was his own name that he had just seen.[507]

Although the epitaph inside the tomb refers to Lancelot as the rescuer of the castle, the spell is still not broken. The lord of the castle has fled and, furthermore, captured an advancing group of knightly heroes of the Round Table. To free the castle, Lancelot must wait forty days or find a magic key. Meanwhile, Arthur and Ginover arrive at the *Dolorose Garde*, believing it had been liberated. Instead of being received by their entourage as

expected, they are frightened by the sight of a number of *new* inscriptions: citizens of the neighbouring town have overnight secretly re-labelled the tombs with words declaring all Arthur's knights dead—probably in order to incite the king to retaliatory strikes and thus speed up the liberation of the castle. By doing so the citizens create a radical *thanatopos* that anticipates the final doom of the Knights of the Round Table at the very end of the romance, in the *Mort Artu*.

The setting of the cemetery alludes to the final *Joie de la curt* episode in *Erec et Enide* by Chrétien de Troyes. There, Erec comes across a series of pointed poles in the garden of Mabonagrin, on which the heads of failed knights are impaled. The tomb inscriptions on the cemetery of the *Dolorose Garde* also refer to the heads of the defeated that are attached on tops of the merlons of the castle wall. However, the cemetery not only aims at deterring intruders, but also mirrors the culture of commemoration. Since the memory of the dead cannot be preserved by their transient faces, individually designed epitaphs are minted in robust memorial materials. A cleric accompanies Arthur and reads the epitaphs to him:

> […] *"Hie lyt myn herre Gawan, und das ist syn heubt." Er laß off eim andern:"Hie lyt myn herre Ywan, und ist das syn heubt." Er laß off eim andern:"Hie lyt myn herre Ywan, und das ist syn heubt, des großen Friens eins koniges sun." Sie lasen furter allenthalben, und der konig und alle die mit im waren machten den meisten jamer von aller der welt*. (*LuGin* I, 486, 12)
>
> […] and they went on until they came to a gravestone which bore the name of Sir Gawain and said, "Here lies Gawain and up there is his head." And other stones said the same of all knights that Gawain had brought with him.[508]

Although the corresponding heads do not belong to his knights, Arthur is overwhelmed by the scene. The manipulated tombs make him believe that his best knights have died and that their return to the Arthurian court has forever been denied. The whole scene undermines the very idea of tombs as reliable stores of memory, instead showing epitaphs as susceptible to deceptive manipulation.[509] Even though (or perhaps precisely because) they do not refer to their authors, tomb inscriptions always suggest a factuality which can hardly be questioned if the dead lie hidden under their gravestones.

Finally, Lancelot succeeds in breaking the spell of the castle by using a script-bearing magic key. But the uncanny cemetery vision has accurately prefigured the end of the novel: while in the *Mort Artu* Lancelot is indeed buried at the *Dolorose Garde*, Arthur

arranges a huge burial place in St Stephen's Cathedral in Camelot, not for himself and his spouse but for all the fallen knights and ladies of his kingdom. Moreover, Lancelot's status as the best knight is compromised. After having committed adultery, he is no longer considered suitable for the important search for the Holy Grail recounted in the *Queste*. With the solemn appointment of his son Galaad on the day of Pentecost, the romance's event structure changes fundamentally: from then on *aventiure* is only assigned to Galaad and his immaculate companions, while the rest of the Round Table experiences a long uneventful period. Various tombs, such as the voice of the burning tomb of Simeu and the epitaph on the tomb of Corbenic Castle, anticipate this conferral of the protagonist status from Lancelot to Galaad.

This changing event structure is accompanied by a reevaluation of knighthood itself. Galaad's initial *aventiure*, which is analogous to his father's first adventure in that it also consists of a grave opening, demonstrates this. In a monastery, Galaad is led to the grave of his ancestor Nascien, from which a ghastly voice resonates. The monks predict that he will find a letter (*buchstaben*) under the tomb slab.[510] Yet, after having dispelled a devilish figure emerging out of the open sarcophagus, he finds not letters but the body of an armed knight. An old monk teaches him about the allegorical meaning of the adventure. The solidity of the tomb slab stands for the hardness of the world, the corpse for the hardness of the people and the voice for the words of Pontius Pilate. Galaad's *aventiure* thus acts as a symbol of the advent and passion of Christ, which in turn points to the advent of the redeemer Galaad himself. The missing letters mark a striking turning point: instead of looking for written documents of the past, Galaad is instructed to discern the truth of creation in the pure materiality of things. The episode hints at a semiotic view of the world according to which all created things can be interpreted as signs of divine revelation.

After Galaad has concluded the quest for the Holy Grail, there are no *aventiures* left for the other knights to endure. Bohort, Galaad's companion, delivers a last eyewitness account after his return from Sarras before Arthur orders the chronicles to be archived in the Royal Abbey at Salisbury. From then on, the cyclical documentation of events at court is replaced by a final biographical monumentalisation in St Stephen's Cathedral:[511] major and minor characters are placed here one after the other. Lancelot and Arthur are buried separately—most likely because in this way they remain excluded from a collective *memoria* of moral decline, which actually dominates the image given in the

cathedral of Camelot.

Two aspects of the *Mort Artu*'s *lieu de mémoire* are relevant. First, it continues the Arthurian chronicle by giving detailed descriptions of the tombs and by citing eight epitaphs, converging the narration with historiography. Second, it again features the tombs' potential for deception and the agency of sepulchral inscriptions. King Arthur, wishing to create a collective sepulchral memorial for his own court, unintentionally triggers its demise. Because they leave out the accidental circumstances of the deaths of the deceased, but still name the person who appears to be responsible, the tombs in St Stephen's Cathedral cause hatred and hostility in the courtly society, generating conflict in the story.[512] For example, Garheiss von Tharahen was killed by an apple given to him accidentally by Ginover, who is then mentioned on his tomb as his murderer. Fräulein von Challot dies out of excessive love for Lancelot, who is named as the cause of her death on her tomb. Such ambiguous epitaphs and many more trigger fatal events after the quest for the Holy Grail has finished. Although they were erected without fraudulent intent, they invoke further battles and violence among the members of Arthur's court. In a world without *aventiure*, the Arthurian society itself brings back "eventfulness" by unleashing fatal entanglements through the public exhibition of tomb inscriptions.

IV

All three of my examples display the notion that the medial and material design of tombs can contribute to evoking the past in the present. While tombs are cited in historiography in order to provide historical evidence and to preserve the memory of the deceased, literary texts use them to reflect on the relation between the individual and universal time, between personal identity and kinship and on the connection between past, present and future. The three texts use different medial and material techniques to highlight the tomb passages.

Orderic Vitalis dedicates a large portion of his history of the contemporary present to honouring the deceased of his own time. The number of epitaphs, which he cites verbatim and in their entirety, create rhythmic and typographic disruptions of his text, rendering the insertions audible and visible for the reader. Furthermore, Orderic describes the materiality and the spatial arrangement of the gravestones meticulously, which fosters historical authenticity. While he aims at visualising certain places,

the indications in the layout and the change from prose to verse invite the reader to retrospectively become part of the commemoration.

The second example, the *Alexandreis*, is affiliated with the classical epic tradition. In the Middle Ages, the conquest of Alexander is not only relevant historically, but also relates to the history of salvation. Tombs here exhibit the transition of the empires and function as chronotopic spaces in which the heroic age is related to universal history. The final epitaph on Darius's tomb, which Alexander has endowed, is generally directed towards every reader, but its meaning only becomes accessible to those recipients with knowledge of the history of salvation, such as the medieval readers of the *Alexandreis*.

In the *Prosa Lancelot* the tomb motif is integrated into overlapping courtly, historical and religious patterns of narration. Due to their enigmatic character, tombs attract knights errant looking for *aventiure*, but only Lancelot is capable of opening some of the graves, where he finds the bodies of his ancestors. In order to connect Lancelot to his origins, the metonymic principle of representing the deceased via signs and materiality seems oddly insufficient. It is superseded by the autoptic principle of first-hand-encounter with the dead. In the finale of the romance, this wariness towards the ability of sepulchral representation itself resonates in the repeated misinterpretations of epitaphs, which lead to the collapse of the Arthurian court.

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Michael R. Ott

Text-Bearing Warriors: Inscriptions on Weapons

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I

Weapons are, as any dictionary entry will readily confirm, objects which can be used to inflict bodily harm or to defend oneself in conflict and combat. Certainly, this definition encompasses a rather large number of things that may potentially serve as an offensive or defensive weapon. The weaponry I will treat in this chapter, however, will be rather more limited since medieval knights, fashioned as they are by chivalric romances and *chansons de geste*, do not typically exhaust all such possibilities. This limitation is due to several reasons that have much more to do with the cultural imagination than with practical purposes and real-world requirements. And what is true for weapons in general is also true for inscriptions on weapons. The form and function of inscriptions are very much shaped by cultural concepts, by notions of heroism, for example, and by concepts of identity. Consequently, my discussion begins with a broader view of this cultural figuration before focussing more narrowly on several concrete script-bearing artefacts as case studies. Finally, I will provide a more detailed reading of *Perceval*/*Parzival* to show script-bearing weapons within a wider network of inscribed artefacts.

As I have just suggested, the choices knights have with regard to the weapons they employ are culturally predetermined. This selection assures the knight’s status and restricts his behaviour. After all, chivalry obliges, at least according to courtly literature, that the knight must abide by a strict set of rules. Knightly etiquette, spelled out for example in Hartmann von Aue’s *Iwein* (524–542), allows for jousting and sword-fighting, but certainly not for a bar fight. These rules of engagement work to contain the

violence of the encounter—urging the winner, for instance, to spare a defeated opponent's life. Consequently, these rules construct a combatant's victory not only as a function of his physical prowess, but as a manifestation of his superior moral values, with both qualities reciprocally establishing his honour. Vernacular literatures of the Middle Ages promoted those norms and standards firmly and effectively—mostly (but not exclusively) by means of male role models.[513] Thus imaginative literature establishes chivalry as a mode of male nobility, as a courtly code of conduct, and as a distinct set of social values. These ideologies are also crucial in order to properly evaluate the status of weapons—whether they are inscribed or not—with regard to a broader cultural background. We can safely assume that inscriptions reflect and somehow spell out such gendered values and social demands even if the inscription's content may seem not to do so overtly. But these rather abstract cultural conditions are just one important aspect of weapon's role in literature.

In order to identify weapons that tend to bear inscriptions we have to ask ourselves which weapons are employed, how and in what order they are used, and to what purpose. Certainly, choice, sequence, and usage are crucial with regard to the way inscriptions on weapons are fashioned. The chivalric parameters established for weaponry dictate that a courtly knight will conduct his attacks first with pole weapons (like lances) and then with bladed weapons (like swords). In addition to personal armour (chainmail or moulded metal plates covering at least some parts of the body) the medieval chivalric hero typically also carries a shield to actively block hostile blows and strikes. These knightly weapons are, furthermore, an active part of particular practices, relationships, and spatial arrangements. These aspects have immediate consequences for the way inscriptions on weapons are modelled with regard to, for example, an inscription's positioning, its content, target, reception, and attribution. An inscription on a sword, for instance, is more likely to reflect a relation to its owner than to the enemy. An inscription on a helmet, on the other hand, which is not readable for its wearer, might instead address the enemy.

In contrast to lances and swords, missiles (like javelins) and blunt instruments (like axes or clubs) are deemed dishonourable instruments of war. We can recognise Rainouart as an ambivalent warrior in *Aliscans*, for instance, because although he has a strong body due to his noble lineage he bears an ignoble club.[514] Not surprisingly, therefore, romances and *chansons de geste* do not tell of any inscribed clubs, just as they do not tell of bar fights.

It is worth noting that the club is made of wood, not metal. As we learn in the chapter on inscriptions in wood, such objects are more closely associated with nature, easily accessible and relatively unrefined as an artefact. This material's proximity to nature excludes it from the purview of courtly culture, thereby defining the club's bearer as the antithesis of the chivalric hero. Consequently, clubs are represented as not worth the time or resources required to endow them with script because they lack courtliness and, therefore, social merit.

To grasp the significance of inscribed weapons in literature it is useful to keep in mind that these imagined worlds are connected to real-world phenomena. This is even more important because real inscriptions can illuminate the functions and designs of inscriptions with which medieval audiences might have been familiar. That does not mean, however, that these real-world aspects are translated one-to-one into literary story worlds. But we may consider historical script-bearing weapons as a background setting against which chivalric romances and *chansons de geste* stage their inscribed weapons. Archaeological findings of inscribed weapons are, in fact, quite similar to those we encounter in medieval literature. Narrated inscriptions on weapons appear mainly on helmets, coats of mail, swords, lances, and (occasionally) on shields. Similarly, inscriptions on real weapons in Central Europe, mostly retrieved by archaeologists, appear on helmets (like the eighth-century Coppergate helmet from York), shields, coats of mail and especially on swords. Typically these inscriptions are indications of ownership or an artist's mark. The famous Ulfberht swords are perhaps the most prominent examples of an artist's branding, featuring smith's marks and presumably the smith's name—Ulfberht being a distinctly Frankish name. As archaeological findings show, these swords circulated widely. Exemplars from the ninth to the eleventh centuries have been found in Central and Eastern Europe, England, and Scandinavia. The inscription ("+VLFBERHT +" or similar) seems to have been a proper product label and a sign of quality (and therefore even became the object of counterfeiting).

Inscriptions on actual weapons can also provide a devotional link to the transcendent sphere and, consequently, can be a magical enhancement. Other swords show crosses, sequences of letters (standing for a blessing, for instance) and immediately readable inscriptions, often with religious content. Holy words and holy names were "probably supposed to invoke God's holy name and his grace to gain support and protection in battle".[515]

Unfortunately, many of the abbreviations on swords are notoriously hard to decipher, sometimes even incomprehensible; and scholarship is still in its early stage. That is why John Worley and Thomas Gregor Wagner recently proposed "sword epigraphy," an interdisciplinary field of epigraphic scholarship devoted especially to inscriptions on swords.[516] Although Worley and Wagner obviously have not yet thought of collaboration with literary studies, fictional script-bearing artefacts may support their scholarship because literature offers additional information on the cultural context and perception of inscribed weapons. For instance, inscriptions on swords may seem unnecessary, even implausible from a modern point of view, because we normally assume that inscriptions do not add anything to the practical functionality of a weapon. Seen rationally, a sword with a name written on it does not cut any better or worse than an uninscribed one. But such a basic material functionality is not everything, especially in a Christian context, and, consequently, medieval epics and romances present a much more complex perspective on the capacities of inscribed weapons. From a medieval point of view inscriptions can be much more than ornamental and much more than just an enhancement of a weapon's basic material functions.

II

My analysis of narrated inscriptions on weapons begins by presenting brief examples from the Norse, English and Latin traditions illustrating the functions inscriptions play in relation to the different types of arms I have outlined. Inscriptions may explicitly perform very basic albeit important functions, such as helping with identification, as we can see in the tale of Sir Gareth in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, presumably written in the 1460s and first published in 1485. The main motifs in the story of Gareth's rise to knighthood are anonymity and disguise. He arrives nameless at King Arthur's court, fights anonymously against knights, and frees a damsel in distress while incognito. Gareth's name and origin are finally exposed when a herald, during a tournament, comes close enough to him to read the inscription on his helmet: *But at the laste an herrowde* ["herald"] *rode nyghe Sir* Gareth *as he coude, and there he sawe wryten aboute his helme in golde, seyynge, This helme is sir* Garethis of Orkeney*. Than the heroude cryed as he were woode* ["as if he were mad", read: "with great excitement"]—*and many herowdys with hym: "This is Sir*

Gareth of Orkenay *in the yealow armys!"* (219). Clearly, the inscription is an indication of ownership, a function typical of historical weapons. Though this might seem mundane at first sight, the letters intervene dramatically here to expose the formerly mysterious knight. The inscription functions as an authentification device, as the chain of shouting heralds proceeds to broadcast what is treated as credible information to the whole tournament at record speed. Gareth can only maintain his disguise by virtue of a magical ring which lets him change the colour of his armour to leave the tournament unnoticed. Interestingly, writing here appears to be the only truth that is not questioned or undermined. Indeed, the inscription is proof of the power of the written word to cut through the doubt and ignorance in a world where writing is largely absent.

Not every inscription is meant to be read, though. In the Old Norse *Sigrdrífumál* (thirteenth c.) we find some instructions on how to scratch runes of victory (*Sigrúnar*) into various parts of a sword: *Sigrúnar þú skalt rísta*, the text says, *ef þú vilt sigr hafa* ("runes of victory you shall inscribe if you want to gain a victory", stanza 6, 191).[517] These inscriptions are presumably thought to perform an apotropaic function, to turn away harm and to obtain protection from the gods. In this case, emphasis is placed on the writing, not the reading, of the inscription. Thus, an inscribed weapon's effectiveness is not necessarily predicated on it being read. King Richard's spear whereon *Goddes hyghe name* is engraved in the early fourteenth-century *Richard Coer de Lyon* (5720) functions similarly. This inscription marks the end and climax of a description of Richard's armour, which also features figures of leopards and the image of a dove. The name of God is distinct, however, because it transcends the representative functions of the figurative portrayals to enhance the weapon's physical potential. Inscription here allows the lance to partake in the sacral sphere of godly influence. No wonder then that this script-bearing artefact points to actual historical practices among crusaders.[518]

Smith's marks, similarly, may be read from time to time but are not meant for repeated reading. Sometimes, it is not even completely clear if these marks consist of linguistic characters, or whether they should be treated iconographically. In *Waltharius*, a Latin epic probably composed in the ninth century, Walther, preparing for his escape, asks Hiltgunt to get a specific coat of mail, the one with the smith's marks (*loricam fabrorum insigne ferentem*, 264). This is an early narrative example of such a mark, clearly backed up by archaeological findings where such marks

identify weapons of extraordinary quality.

My last brief example, an inscription on a shield in the Old Norse *Magus Saga Jarls* (c. 1300), is rather unusual because it transforms the shield's bearer (38). This shield moves us away from historical realia into the purely magical and fantastical realm and highlights how writing can transform an object, giving it completely new capacities. Everybody who carries the shield of Rögnvaldr, engraved with runes by Jarl Mágus, looks just like Rögnvaldr himself. This results in the tragedy of a warrior killing his own son, while believing he is killing Rögnvaldr. Here the runic inscription transforms the object entirely, changing rather than merely enhancing its use value. It does not have to be a shield to do this work (the warrior could wear a ring or drink a potion to get the same effect), but the shield as a duplication of a warrior's body is a metaphorically appealing object for such a magical act of protectively obscuring identity.

III

And yet, inscriptions on weapons do more than merely determine identity, as does a badge or an identifying mark. As part of an accumulation and entanglement of things and animate beings, inscriptions also participate in the construction of knightly identity in a much broader sense. The medieval knight, as indicated by the French term *chevalier* or the German term *Ritter*, is by definition a mounted warrior. He is defined by a series of complex relationships between himself, his mount and his armament, which simultaneously present him as combat-ready and worthy of the court. These components are more than just parts and extensions of his body; they are an essential part of the hybrid unit we rather simplistically call "knight". These horse-manmetal hybrids—what Jeffrey Cohen, inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, calls an "assemblage"—undermine distinctions between the human subject, the animal, and inanimate object.[519]

One manifestation of such blurred distinctions is the frequent naming of both horses and weapons in heroic narratives. Naming creates a special relationship, an appreciation that, in the case of the horse, makes a companion out of a beast and creates a "man-animal alliance".[520] Knights in romance often treat their mounts almost like comrades or even friends.[521] We grasp, for instance, how attached Gawan is to his horse "Gringuljete" in *Parzival* through his relief at their reunion after Gringuljete is abducted. Just like horses, important weapons also receive names. Such

naming emphasises that the knight's sword is portrayed as much more than a passive instrument belonging to a knight. In heroic poetry swords are not merely described as acting like persons, but rather, as Arthur Thomas Hatto already suggested in 1966, "swords are persons".[522] For our purposes we may take this to mean that swords can act as agents in a narrative. This is most evident when swords have their own histories. In *Chanson d'Aspremont*, for example, a twelfth-century epic and prequel to *Chanson de Roland*, we learn of the Muslim history of one of Roland's signature objects, his sword Durendal.[523] Objects with names can even move from one narrative to another, as we see with Beowulf's sword Nægling, which is strikingly similar to a sword called Naglringr in the Old Norse *Þiðreks saga af Bern*. Naglringr "was made by the dwarf Alfrikr, who, when captured by Þiðrekr, ransoms his life by stealing it from its owner, the giant Grímur, and giving it to Þiðrekr" who later "gives it to Heimir, whose first sword was Blodgang".[524] Viewing the weapon from a biographical perspective, this is not only a list of persons but a map of a certain sword's peregrination and an account of a series of relationships.

Such "biographies of artefacts" that naming facilitates provide vivid evidence of the significance and liveliness of weapons in the medieval imagination.[525] Naming a weapon contributes to its anthropomorphism and, thus, furnishes it with a kind of agency. Inscriptions support this process, giving a weapon both prestige and, most importantly, a voice. This should not come as a surprise, since, as James Paz has pointed out recently with regard to Anglo-Saxon material culture, there are "embodied" voices whose bodies "are not fleshy human ones".[526] Crucial here is the fact that these inscriptions are not just letters to be read silently, but function here especially in an oral mode to generate voices that speak to us.

It is worth elaborating this thought a little further because it reveals a crucial gap in scholarly debate. Among the many things we may learn by examining narrated inscriptions, their positioning in-between and even beyond established categories like oral and written culture is crucial. For quite some time now, medievalists have engaged in discussions about medieval literature's status with regard to orality and literacy, and with regard to pictures and writing. As useful as these categories have proved to be, these binaries tend to marginalise narrated inscriptions because they do not fit neatly in any of those categories. Produced outside of the manuscript culture that defines literacy, inscriptions can also function simultaneously as

iconography and language, as evidenced by the Chi-Rho or chrismon (a monogram of the first two letters of Greek *Khristos*, chi *X* and rho *P*). Inscriptions, such as the epitaph, require the reader to voice them. Therefore, when asked why medievalists have paid little attention to narrated inscriptions, we may want to point out that these extraordinary script-bearing artefacts have slipped through the cracks of the established scholarly discussions because they complicate the parameters of the debates.

To begin to understand this complexity, let us turn our attention to an impressive voice-bearing artefact: Roland's helmet in the German version of *Chanson de Roland*, adapted by a priest called Konrad c. 1170. This example illustrates several of the aforementioned arguments: the helmet clearly is intrinsically tied to its heroic wearer; its inscription is placed on the outside of the helmet and therefore addresses the enemy; via the inscription the helmet is anthropomorphised; the inscription establishes a spatial relation in terms of the proximity and withdrawal of the enemy reader; the helmet and inscription are an expression of Roland's heroic identity; and, not least, the helmet bears a name the inscription spells out.

In Konrad's *Rolandslied*, the helmet appears for the first time before the Battle of Roncevaux when the narrator carefully describes how Roland arms himself. He puts on a bright tunic with a golden dragon attached to its breast, as well as splendid leg-coverings bedecked with gold and pearls; he bears a spear to which he attaches a white flag embroidered with animals and birds. Finally, he takes his sword, Durendart, and dons a helmet, which also bears a name:

der helm hiez Venerant,	The helmet the hero put on
den der helt ûf bant,	was called "Venerant",
mit golde beworchten,	embraced with gold—
den die haiden harte vorchten.	the heathens feared it.
mit guldînen buochstaben	Golden letters
was an der lîsten ergraben:	were inscribed on the metal stripe:
"elliu werlt wâfen,	"All the weapons of the world
die müezen mich maget lâzen.	have to leave me a maid.
wilt du mich gewinnen,	If you try to capture me,
du füerest scaden hinnen".	you'll carry damage away with you."[527]

(3291–3300)

Unlike the other parts of Roland's outfit, which are opulent (gold, gems) and figurative (dragon, animals), the helmet displays not only quality and value but also performs a speech act as a somehow independent actor that nevertheless is closely tied to

the hero. Interestingly, the claim to behold its maidenhood figuratively gives it a specifically human body, intensifying the anthropomorphism of this remarkable artefact.

To be sure, not all script-bearing weapons are so extraordinary. Nonetheless inscriptions make a specific weapon stand out from all the other uninscribed weaponry. Script adds something merely by its existence, not in terms of basic material qualities but in terms of cultural capital, creating prestige objects. Roland's helmet, for example, not only bears a name but makes a name for itself and, consequently, for its wearer. Thus, inscriptions on weapons mark the weapon as special and transform a rather ordinary item into an object of increased and attentive perception. That is why the inscription's reference to the heathens' fear is important: The heathens' fear is the counterpart of the helmet's ostentatious voice, the reaction to an aggressive invocation of an anthropomorphic and an acting object.

Whereas a helmet directs its voice at an opponent, other objects, like swords, tend to address their owners. Of course, not all swords have owners, as is evident with one of the most famous weapons of medieval literature, the sword in the stone, a motif that appears in the Matter of Britain in relation to both King Arthur and Galahad, the Grail Knight. Nevertheless, the sword's quest for its rightful owner illustrates the complex role the inscribed weapon plays in the constitution not only of the knight but of the hero and the world he inhabits. The iconicity of the sword in the stone in contemporary popular culture, particularly movies inspired by Malory's *Morte Darthur*, makes it a familiar narrative device as a public test that identifies a hero and determines his destiny.

The iconicity the sword in the stone has gained is hardly surprising given the theatricality of its initial appearance in the thirteenth-century *La Queste del Saint Graal*, and subsequent vernacular translations, such as Malory's *Morte*. In Book One of Malory's version, the Tale of Sankgreal, Lancelot arrives at King Arthur's court without Galahad whom he dubbed knight that very morning. At the court, the crowds are drawn to the spectacle of a marvel that requires the audience to learn its own part in the play: a red marble stone is floating down the river, into which is inserted a sword bearing an inscription. The inscription provides the script for how to interact with and understand the puzzle it presents as a part of the Quest for the Holy Grail. First, the inscription on the sword accompanies another inscription on the Siege Perilous. Just like the sword, the seat's inscription reserves it for a special knight, that is, for Galahad. Both inscriptions are

intrusions of a higher power making its will legible. Contrary to expectations, this inscription by a higher power does not change the order of things. As Michelle R. Wright points out, "the arming ritual" in the Vulgate Cycle "most often does not actually transform a male character into a knight. Rather, the investment of the hero with arms renders visible an ontology, that is, an essence of being, that always already exists".[528]

Second, even though the familiarity of this scene might render the inscription redundant in our contemporary imaginations, the assemblage of sword and stone is actually enigmatic and requires explanation. In Malory, the king and his knights hurry to see this astonishing artefact. But, although they can see the material arrangement, what it means and how it works remains unclear. That is why the inscription is so important: as a kind of manual it offers a practical set of instructions that turn the mysterious artefact into a tool used in the mundane political world.

Drawn to the river, Arthur and his knights attempt to decipher the enigmatic arrangement, their gaze moving upwards, from the stone to the sword and, finally, to the inscribed pommel. This episode in which the court collectively reads the artefact is translated quite consistently in the various vernacular translations of the French original, a corpus that suggests its own collective extradiegetic reading event:[529]

> *Li rois descent maintenant pour ceste merveille veoir, et si font tout li autre. Et quant il furent venu a la rive, si troverent le perron qui estoit issus de l'aigue et estoit de marbre vermeil; et el perron avoit une espee fichie qui estoit et bele et riche par samblant, et ert li poins d'une pierre preciouse ouvrés molt soltilment a letres d'or.*
> *Li baron regardent les letres qui disoient: JA NUS M'OSTERA SE CIL NON A QUI COSTÉ JE PENDRAI ET CIL SERA LI MILDRES CHEVALIERS DEL MONDE.*

> *So all the knyghtes wente with hym; and whan they cam unto the ryver they founde there a stone fletynge, as hit were of rede marbyll, and therein stake a fayre ryche swerde, and the pomell thereof was of precious stonys wrought with lettirs of golde subtylé.*
> *Than the barownes redde the lettirs, whych seyde in thys wyse*:
> *NEVER SHALL MAN TAKE ME HENSE BUT ONLY HE BY WHOS SYDE I OUGHT TO HONGE: AND HE SHALL BE THE BESTE KNYGHT OF THE WORLDE.*

> *Und der konig ging hinab die abentúr zu besehen, und also daten die anderen alle. Da sie kamen an das waßer, da sahen sie das die súle was ußer dem waßer und was von marmolsteyn rott. Und in der súlen sahen sie das ein schwert was gehefft richlich und gar schön. Und das hefft von dem schwert was ein rubin, und waren guldin buchstaben gar behendiclich darinn gegraben. Und die held besahen die buchstaben, die sprachen: "Nÿmant sol mich hynnen uß ziehen, es sy dann der mich von recht haben sol und sol auch der best ritter syn in der welt".*

> *E quando el rey llego a la ribera, e vio el padron, e la espada ay metida por el encantamento de Merlin, assi como el cuento lo ha deuisado, e via la vayna que estaua cerca de la espada e las letras que Merlin escriuiera, fue todo espantado, e dixo: "Nueuas vos dire agora: sabed que por esta espada sera començado el mejor cauallero del mundo, y esta es la prueua por que se ha de conocer, ca ninguno, si no fuere el mejor cauallero del mundo, no podria sacar la spada deste padron".*

The inscription on the sword not only gives the sword a voice but also a destined location: the hip of a knight where the sword is *ought to honge*, as Malory's version states. The placement of the sword also socially "places" Galahad, the knight on whose side it will hang. For Galahad, though, this sword is just an interim weapon. He receives swords three times, with each weapon signalling a new stage of his journey: "the first [sword] associates Galahad with the Arthurian court and is given by Lancelot; the second establishes a celestial allegiance and appears mysteriously in a floating stone near Arthur's court; and the third signals Galahad's final spiritual perfection".[530]

The repeated arming of Galahad epitomises the entanglement of the heroic subject with the object world. Galahad does not just wield a weapon well, he wields a particular weapon that not only establishes but determines his identity. The swords also make apparent the object's agency to change the relationships of the narrated world. Indeed, the sword in the stone with its inscription is, literally, an adventure, something that forces itself on Arthur, his knights, and Galahad—something that has to be dealt with because it approaches and addresses them. The inscription is the voice of a challenge, and a test. The whole arrangement stages a public event, visually materialising the chivalric world's search for the best knight, thereby choreographing acts and reorganising social relations and hierarchies. That is what makes this scene so special: we can watch a weapon, suddenly washed ashore, staging a quest for its destined owner and thereby transforming the Arthurian story-world.

IV

The other Grail knight Parzival in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* also vividly illustrates how closely a knight's identity is tied to his weapons. The protagonist's childhood in the woods denied him chivalric accoutrements. The only weapons he has—a javelin as well as bow and arrow—are ignoble from a courtly point of view. Consequently, when Parzival sets out to become a

knight his first experience of combat fighting Ither of Gaheviez is a violation of knightly behaviour; the young hero has yet to learn that a courtly knight does not kill his opponent from a cowardly distance with a missile, or use ignoble tools to harm a fellow (and, in this case, even related) knight. Nevertheless, negative consequences are yet to come, while the immediate results are certainly favourable—at least for Parzival. By slaying Ither, Parzival gains the remarkable armour of red gold that earns Ither the designation, The Red Knight (155,4–158,16). Parzival perceives this act of appropriation as legitimate because King Arthur granted him the spoils of this battle conducted on his behalf. This "gift" highlights the cultural framework operating in chivalric romance in which persons are connected via the transfer of things. The red armour belongs to those "highly individuated and personalized objects" which are typical for gift-giving cultures.[531] Such objects have, as Andrew Cowell has pointed out, their "own specific history" and are able to "metonymically express the identity of the owner or giver".[532] With the help of his newly acquired metal skin, and with the help of a squire who has to assist him in putting on the intricate accoutrements, Parzival provisionally enters knighthood by becoming the Red Knight, identifiable in the adventures that follow solely by his armour. This armour, then, does not just represent the knight but becomes a part of him, an extension of his body, and the source of his identity.

Wolfram's *Parzival* as a whole elegantly illustrates the entanglement of humans and the material world and therefore offers an excellent example of the knight as assemblage that merits closer analysis. We may read this passage of Parzival's early career as a comprehensive introduction to the rules of chivalric combat, arms and armour. The lesson directed at the hero simultaneously invites the aristocratic audience to rediscover the unusual complexity of a knightly assemblage it has come to take for granted. In fact, many lessons Wolfram von Eschenbach offers in his Grail narrative come by way of objects that instruct readers through their inscriptions. *Parzival*'s highly involved narrator repeatedly broaches the issue of the relation between the oral and the written, source and adaption, and medium and communication, more broadly speaking. These issues are particularly focalised by several script-bearing artefacts that appear during the narration, where script, materiality, and communication extend far beyond the context of quill and parchment. Still another important reason for discussing inscriptions in Wolfram's *Parzival* is how remarkably

different his approach to narrated inscriptions is in comparison to Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*—Wolfram's source, though one he elaborates and adapts significantly.

Chrétien's romance (written around the year 1180) includes only one single narrated inscription. This inscription, a smith's mark that indicates provenance, is a realistic detail evoking real-world swords; but this inscription does not have much impact on the narrative. The context is quickly recounted: After Perceval finds his way to the Grail Castle, he receives a magnificent sword from the wounded Fisher King. It is remarkable because it is lightweight, because there are only three of its kind and because it will never break—except when threatened by a certain peril, known only to its forger. Even the place of production is known because it is written on the sword: *Si vit bien ou ele fu faite*; / *Car en l'espee estoit escrit* ("By this means he saw clearly, where it had been made because it was written on the sword", 3136f.). Although the sword is distinguished by this mark as special, even exceptional, the inscription is primarily an indicator of prestige. What is remarkable, however, is what Wolfram von Eschenbach made of this inscription.

We may assume that Wolfram, as a reader of Chrétien, used the inscription on the sword as the inspiration for his numerous script-bearing artefacts. The transfer of this inscription and artefact into Wolframs "re-narration" marks the first instance of several inscriptions on things related to the grail. Indeed, the idea of inscribing things seems to have provided the German author with a narrative tool to expand the range of writing within his story-world. Ultimately, Wolfram's romance contains a whole cluster of inscriptions and related phenomena, including a number of inscribed weapons. The inscriptions themselves fall into different kinds of categories. Some are about knowledge and communication, some are related to persons, some are about blessing and healing. Hence, the inscribed weapons fall somewhere on a spectrum between natural signs and manuscript textuality. A quick overview might be helpful to get an impression of the amplitude of relevant phenomena.

I will start with the more abstract examples. In his *Parzival*, Wolfram presents (1) stars as writing; or, more precisely, he presents a certain stellar constellation as writing (454,21–23). We learn about this when the narrator explains to us that a heathen named Flegetanis once read the name of the grail in the stars. (2) Parzival's half-brother, Feirefiz, whose brindled skin is black and white, is described (by Parzival) as looking like a parchment with writing on it (747,26–29). Although Parzival is speaking

figuratively, he nevertheless connects the idea of writing (on parchment) with the living body as a material to write on. Similar to the connection of writing on parchment and skin are the (3) drops of blood on snow Parzival encounters near King Arthur and his court (282,1 ff.). The red drops on white blood remind Parzival of his beloved; as signs, the drops of blood work much like alphabetical script. Their impact, however, is overwhelming, showing the power of well-placed signs. After reading and deciphering the signs as the face of his beloved, Parzival falls into a trance-like state that can only be suspended by breaking his fixated gaze from the drops of blood.

(4) The inscription on the grail combines these more abstract inscriptions on the one hand and concrete and durable inscriptions on the other. In Wolfram's account the grail is a stone brought to earth by fallen angels, which bears inscriptions repeatedly and regularly (470,21–30; 483,19–484,12; 781,12–19; 796,17–21; 818,20–819,2). These inscriptions appear suddenly and disappear after they have been read. Since these "text messages" disappear after reading, they interestingly share the characteristics of oral communication. Therefore, they deliver very precise messages. The inscriptions inform the grail community about new members; they predict how Anfortas can be healed; and they even introduce new rules. At the end of Wolfram's romance, for instance, an inscription announces to the Grail Company that whoever becomes the next ruler may not be asked about his origin and ancestry. Similar to the inscription on Sir Gareth's helmet, the grail's messages are not to be questioned but promulgate authority, mediated specifically by the written word.

Interestingly, the most concrete inscriptions appear on armour. (5) Parzival's father, Gahmuret, is honoured with an epitaph that is engraved into his diamond helmet (107,29 ff.) While the chapter on inscriptions in medieval German literature features a discussion of this important passage, for our purposes it is worth noting that Gahmuret was killed by the blow of a lance that penetrated his helmet and head. Thus, the inscription's positioning is highly significant: the epitaph links Gahmuret's grave, his most important piece of armour, the reason for his death, and the memorial inscription.

(6) Just like in Chrétien's account, the sword Parzival receives as a gift from the Fisher King bears some signs or marks (*mâl*, 254,14), maybe smith's marks, maybe letters. (7) The lance that wounds Anfortas, the Grail King, bears either the name of the grail or the name of the lance's owner. If we understand the

equivocal text passage in the latter sense, the attacker's name on the lance makes the attack and the resulting injury even more personal (479,20–23). (8) Anfortas has a sword—assumed to be the one given to Parzival by the Fisher King—which has a blessing inscribed explaining how to forge two knives needed to care for Anfortas's wound (490,18–29).

Considering *Parzival* as laying out a spectrum of reading and writing, script-bearing weapons have to be placed somewhere between reading of natural signs, manuscript culture and a martial culture that is supposed to get along without writing. Smith's marks render readable the quality of a weapon, exposing invisible material properties to the eyes of the beholder. Inscribed swords, as instruments that wound *and* heal, link medical knowledge and those very injuries that necessitate medicine in the first place. Gahmuret's helmet, being transformed from an impenetrable weapon to an elaborate epitaph, enters manuscript culture by means of its bearer's death as a defunct object. Finally, the inscribed lance that wounds Anfortas is used by its owner as a kind of writing, making Anfortas's wound a bloody testimony of personal hatred.

Regardless of where exactly we place Wolfram von Eschenbach's script-bearing weapons on such a spectrum, the crucial point is that he uses them repeatedly in order to overlay his story's arms with a semiotic layer that seriously complicates the romance's order of things. By using weapons as a material to write on, he considerably expands the boundaries of writing itself. But Wolfram also broadens the significance of artefacts that are first of all meant to harm or defend, and not to write hatred, to transfer knowledge, or to function as a memorial inscription. Those martial artefacts cease to be mere instruments of war and are made readable as cultural objects embedded into a vernacular literature that has just started to rewrite warrior culture as chivalry in order to narrate—that is, to understand—military acts as cultural deeds.

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More Than Bling: Inscribed Jewellery Between Social Distinction, Amatory Gift-Giving, and Spiritual Practice

One of the most fascinating aspects of inscribed jewellery is how far it can cross time and space, and how it can connect different cultural practices and fields of knowledge. It is often durable, and attractive or valuable enough to be transported and preserved. For example, a ring with a Kufic inscription interpreted as *il-la-lah* ("For/to Allah") found its way to ninth-century Sweden, and survived into the twenty-first century.[533] The ring began as a religious ornament, was traded, maybe given as a gift, worn as an amulet, buried with a woman, unearthed and misinterpreted by nineteenth-century archaeologists, and finally analysed with an electron microscope and turned from Arabic silver into a virtual 3D model. The ring has thus been part of religious devotional customs, trade, personal ornamentation, burial cult, and archaeological practices.

Medieval literature expresses great interest in setting up such constellations around inscribed jewellery, which often refuse strong categorisation and instead entwine different phenomena, practices and fields.[534] This article interprets such examples, mostly from Middle High German, Old and Middle English texts. As I will show, jewellery functions primarily to create relationships between people—it can symbolize, initiate, affect, and bear witness to them. Inscriptions can increase such constellations' complexity: they can intensify or personalise gifts, add layers of ambiguity, and even stress the way objects interact with people as nonhuman actors.

Two Observations on Methodology

Jewellery has existed from prehistoric to postmodern times. The similarities between archaeological finds and modern objects and practices raise two methodological questions.[535]

First, jewellery challenges us to think about phenomena from other cultures and times, whose deceptive familiarity may

obscure their meaning. We relate to an Anglo-Saxon ring engraved *ðancas* ("thank you") or a seventeenth-century ring inscribed "Y.AM.YOVRS.FOR.EVER".[536] But what about the Wheatley Hill Ring's enigmatic declaration "I am called a ring"?[537] Archaeological approaches therefore work to understand objects within their cultural context, especially when analysing inscribed items. But if we are to always historicise, then on which context do we focus? Do we focus on an object's creation, or on the many other moments when it might have been utilised?[538] Time can change even what items are considered jewellery at all. This article therefore requires some definition of "jewellery", and attends both to an object's original meaning and function and to its shifting contexts.

Secondly, an analysis of inscriptions in medieval literature must consider what historical reality actually can tell us about literary texts. Because literature is rooted in a specific material culture, the more recent research in Material Studies has increased interest in interdisciplinary work. It has reinvigorated debates about how to best draw on historical contexts without either treating literary descriptions of fictional objects like imprecise archaeological reports (whose ambiguities or blank spaces need positivistic amendments), or turning historical context into the last court of appeal about what literature can mean, since literature is perfectly capable of fictionalising historical reality for its own means.[539]

1A Definition of Jewellery

Especially courtly literature revels in describing lavishly adorned objects—arms, goblets, bridles, even perfume dispensers.[540] Clearly, not all that glitters is jewellery. But what about jewels sewn on garments?[541] What do we make of ornaments that resemble other things, such as *bracteat* medals imitating Roman coins,[542] or objects that resemble ornaments, such as pilgrims' medals?[543] Objects might have several functions or change purpose over time.

This article shall use "jewellery" to denote beautiful artefacts designed to be displayed visibly on the body. Part of the value of jewellery derives from craftsmanship, part from its precious substance. A piece of jewellery can consist of several materials, such as gemstones and metal, allowing for complex symbolism. For example, gold often symbolises excellence and inner values, while gems point to wisdom or magic, and are often understood

allegorically.[544] This composite character allows jewellery to appear in diverse contexts in literature. Finally, this article assumes that jewellery has an aesthetic purpose extending beyond any functional demands it might serve—a pin does not have to be set with diamonds to perform its task, for instance.[545]

2Medieval Functions of Inscribed Jewellery Beyond the Aesthetical

The definition of jewellery as a personal, precious ornament worn primarily for its beauty does not mean jewellery was only displayed for its aesthetic appeal. An important source on medieval jewellery, Theophilus Presbyter's *Schedula Diversarum Artiiim* (twelfth century) was transmitted together with treatises on the meaning of colours, medicine, alchemy and astronomy.[546] This range reminds us that medieval jewellery does not have to follow modern categories: surviving amulets, rings, and pendants inscribed with prayers, charms, the names of the Three Kings or the Aramaic magic formula *THEBAL*, entangle what modernity would divide into magic, religion, astrology and medicine.[547] Even medieval attempts to separate magic and religion betray the phenomena's proximity; prohibitions such as Thomas Aquinas' rules (*Summa Theologiae*, ii. 2b, *questio* 96) against inscribing incomprehensible words or invocations of powers other than God's do not seem to have governed most surviving pieces.[548] From a synchronic point of view, an artefact could signify differently to different people, or simultaneously serve several purposes.[549]

A diachronic perspective on inscribed jewellery shows that it could also defy religious, cultural, regional, or temporal divisions. Byzantine influence on medieval ornaments challenges the binary of East and West.[550] Anglo-Saxon metalwork used traditional engravings of animals and zoomorphs to invite multivalence within Christian Mediterranean contexts.[551] Modern scholarship often associated runes with (especially pagan) magic, but few runic inscriptions seem to have served exclusively magical purposes, and many go beyond a simple dichotomy of pagan and Christian.[552] Incomprehensible inscriptions might not be occult but rather seeking to benefit from the prestige associated with literacy by using writing as a decorative element.[553] Latin, Hebrew, or vernacular pagan and Christian charms and prayers, written in Roman or Runic script, or both, appeared on rings or amulets that sometimes even were

reworked from ancient gemstone talismans originally used as seals.[554] The medieval lapidaries that attributed medical and magical powers to them were influenced so fundamentally by Antiquity that the Renaissance left this field of knowledge unchanged.[555]

Jewellery's capacity of entangling different practices, languages, times and cultures can therefore also produce fascinating constellations in literature. In order to interpret inscribed jewellery in medieval literature, this article takes its functions beyond ornamentation as departing points. Aesthetical aspects remain central, but not in the sense of an opposition of pretty versus practical or meaningful objects. Medieval objects often were crafted in ways that drew attention to and involved their material qualities to underline specific points or induce certain reactions—though we should not presuppose a single concept of materiality for the Middle Ages.[556] Accordingly, medieval jewellery should not be thought of as mostly pretty, useless and precious, and occasionally coming with an additional, actual function. Rather, its beauty and preciousness often is what allows jewellery to serve its purpose.

Inscribed jewellery occurs much less often in medieval literature than could be expected given the prominence of both inscriptions and jewellery in literature, along with the archaeological evidence showing that inscribed jewellery would have been conceivable for authors. But the leading question here will not be why inscribed jewellery occurs comparably rarely, but what inscriptions contribute to the respective functions of jewellery.

2.1Showing Political Power and Social Distinction

The most notable purpose of jewellery is to mark social distinction.[557] Literary texts reflect this as well. Characters often wear jewellery in situations of symbolic representation, such as rulers making public appearances. Inscriptions can increase the impact of jewellery, independently of their semantic content, simply because writing enjoyed special prestige.[558] Therefore, wearing jewellery is more than merely decorative. It marks actual, tangible power, and membership in a cultural elite. Because especially chivalric culture constantly re-affirms itself and communicates through such visible, material signs, it is crucial to consider how openly a piece of jewellery is being displayed, by whom, and for whom to see, to understand its

significance for a specific text.

Crowns and wreathes are the most ostentatiously worn form of jewellery. Crowns and diadems are central ruling insignia. Wreathes tend to occur in the contexts of challenge and victory, and can mark seasons, periods, or ceremonies.[559] Their material is often significant—may wreathes consist of spring flowers,[560] and can incorporate symbolically charged plants, such as roses, laurel, or straw.[561] Medieval crowns probably developed from such ancient wreathes. Golden wreathes (as in *Wigalois*, 851–855) testify to the remaining connection between crowns and wreathes. Both appear in similar contexts in literature, as marks of class privilege or excellence. Wreathes are sometimes said to "crown" characters, and the terms sometimes even occur interchangeably.

Few surviving crowns bear inscriptions. There are spectacular exceptions, such as the seventh-century votive crowns of King Reccesuinth and King Swintila, with letters hanging from their rims naming the royal donors.[562] They were probably suspended in consecrated buildings, articulating ownership and standing in for the absent kings. This echoes in the metonymical expression of "the crown" (as in "x belongs to the Crown") for kingship as such. Such expressions can take on a more literal meaning, especially considering Latour's concept of material objects as actants,[563] or the idea of a king's two bodies: crowns can transform someone into a king, symbolizing and creating power. Such public markers become particularly significant when someone's social position is re-negotiated—at coronations, baptisms, or weddings.

In chapter 1 of the *Gesta Romanorum*, an early fourteenth-century medieval collection of exempla, inscribed jewellery mirrors the network that constitutes someone's social identity in such a moment. A knight returns Emperor Pompeius's daughter after duelling her seducer. A sage reconciles her with her father, and she receives several inscribed presents, including a tunic embroidered with words of forgiveness. A king gives her a golden wreath or crown inscribed, "I give you your dignity" (*Ex me tua dignitas*), while his son gives her a ring inscribed, "Come to me, do not be scared. I am your brother" (*Accede ad me, ne timeas! frater tuus sum*), and another saying "You are noble, do not scorn your nobility" (*Nobilis es, nobilitatem tuam ne contempnas*), the knight gives her a ring engraved "I loved you, learn how to love, too" (*Dilexi te, disce diligere*), the sage gives her a ring inscribed "What did I do? How much? Why?" (*Quid feci? quantum? quare?*), and her new husband gives her a sigil that says "Now you are

conjoined with me, do not err" (*Jam conjuncta es, amplius noli errare*).[564] These gifts publicly restore the princess's royal status, and show her new legal authority. Their significance relies on the relationships between receiver and giver, and the situation of the present being made. Some of the inscriptions phrased in the first person can even be read as blending the voices of gift, giver and recipient into one. The crown, for example, symbolises the royal dignity the king is granting the princess, but it is literally the crown, as an object, that bestows it upon her.

Rulers bearing the nature of their power written on their heads already occur in the Book of Revelations, and inscriptions on crowns or diadems occasionally work similarly.[565] But crowns are such strong symbols themselves that the inscription on Alexander's crown in *Der Große Alexander* (late fourteenth century),

Waz uber scheint sün und mön	Everything sun and moon are shining above
Von orient gen occident,	from orient to occident,
Osten, westen, die vier end	east, west, all four ends
Der werlt die müßent dienen mir	of the world have to serve me,
All nach meines herczen gir	everything as my heart desires it
(5930–5934)	

can be read as announcing Alexander's premise, the desire to conquer the entire world, but might also be understood as the crown's own words, thus turning Alexander into a mere servant to power itself. In Seifrit's *Alexander* (c. 1352), Alexander is even contrasted with another source of authority: the Jewish High Priest's headdress is topped with a gemstone engraved with God's name (1835–1848).[566]

Jewellery can also exhibit allegiance or position, such as episcopal rings or livery collars like the Collar of Esses, consisting of 28 golden "S", still a part of the Mayor of London's attire.[567] Rings especially could be worn either openly or more discreetly.[568] However, the degree of overtness also depends on how an object is distributed. For example, in *Wigalois*, a messenger publicly presents Wigalois and his father Gawein with a ring his mother Florie sent them before dying of grief, inscribed,

owê, geselle und ouch mîn kint!	Woe, my confident, and my child, too
von iu mîn varwe ist worden blint,	because of you my colours faded
mîn rôtez golt gar überzint.	and my red gold was coated with tin.
(11365–11367)	

This genealogically charged example blends together the

relationships between husband, mother and son. The inscription appears as Florie's own words, yet its metaphors emphasise that its speaker consists of metal, not flesh and blood. Applying the image of a lover's colours fading from grief to jewellery, the inscription offers two insights. Tin as coating for the more precious gold transforms jewellery into an image for sincerity, thus stressing Florie's virtues. Furthermore, jewellery's usual resistance to the decay described here stresses the enormity of Florie's suffering. It might even recall the ruby she wore when first meeting Gawain, whose colour had the power to obliterate any worries (792–800). The effect is that as the family is symbolically reunited at the story's conclusion, Florie's husband and son mourn her pain and praise her virtue.

The connection between social identity and inscribed rings probably was influenced by the Greco-Roman practice of carrying gemstone seals on rings, consisting mostly of images, sometimes with captions.[569] Later, carvings in the rings' metal increasingly took over that function.[570] The way such rings could be used to transfer or share authority exemplifies two more core principles for inscribed jewellery in literature. One: often, jewellery is given to (or taken by) someone, and this co-determines its significance. We must ask who gave what kind of object to whom, and under which circumstances. The inscription on Florie's ring requires the information that she sent it from her deathbed to the husband who left her, and the son who went in search of him. Secondly, if jewellery is meant to be given away, it makes sense to engrave not its present owner's, but the original giver's name.[571] Inscriptions are not simple name tags or proofs of property—medieval societies were mostly illiterate, and individual pieces were recognisable enough.[572] Instead, such inscriptions can express a special identification between a person and an object, which turns it into a powerful form of articulating a personal connection.[573] Inscriptions, then, do not represent the identity of an object's owner, but a relationship to its giver. A royal donor's inscription would significantly increase an item's value. Such gifts also showcase a ruler's influence—to pick up the idea of a name tag again, a ruler puts his or her mark on someone else. The giver's name and rank would be the simplest inscription, but other surviving examples relate to the gift's story, occasion, or origin, as illustrated by the ninth-century Manchester Ring inscribed, "Ædred owns me, Eanred wrought me".[574] Having the ring itself speak out imagines it as an independent materialisation of the relationship.

Such examples demonstrate that publicly worn jewellery can

show social standing, expressing the relationships an item is connected with, and that an inscription therefore should be read with regard to these networks. Does it, for example, intensify and personalise a gift, specify a relationship, grant authority, or allude to particular moments of a shared past? This is another core principle for almost every piece of inscribed jewellery in literature.

2.2Creating Political Power

In the act of being given or taken, jewellery does not just present social distinction but can also directly create political power. The aristocratic warrior society many premodern and medieval texts depict engages in ritual and symbolic gift-exchange (of weapons, food, jewellery, or service) as a social challenge between giver and receiver that establishes rulers, and negotiates alliances and hierarchies.[575] Variations of "ring-giver" are common Old English metaphors for a lord whose retainers repay his gifts with fighting services.[576] Wearing such jewellery displays a warrior's esteem.[577] It also allows someone to create their own alliances through gift-exchange, to forge connections of loyalty, for instance.[578] Here, too, the way such objects change owners crucially influences their significance. This is especially evident when gifts of friendship are stolen as war trophies, thus becoming tokens of military triumph to one party, and incitements of revenge to the other.[579]

We must note that inscribed jewellery hardly occurs in gift-exchange. For example, it is effectively absent from Old English texts.[580] This might be a question of literary tradition, or of a desire to construct a heroic, illiterate past.[581] Inscriptions might also distinguish an object so much as to inhibit its continuous circulation as a gift. Their close association with particular situational aspects might render the object illegible if given away. Two chapters from the *Gesta Romanorum* mention inscriptions that can only be understood correctly within their situational ties: In chapter 8, a nobleman is executed because he relates a sacrosanct statue's inscription to himself, taking a ring it appears to offer (282–284). In chapter 265 (app. 69), a Saracen realises a statue's inscribed crown actually reveals the location of a treasure buried where its shadow darkens the ground on a specific day (667). Such material and contextual aspects of writing will inevitably transform an original meaning if the object were transferred as a gift. Especially inscriptions concerning specific relationships between donor and recipient might become obscure

or alter their significance.[582] This might be the reason why inscribed jewellery does occur in one particular constellation (one similar to political gift-exchange) where the point is that it must not be passed on: as a gift between lovers.

2.3Amatory Relationships

It is a central function of jewellery to serve as a gift of love.[583] Archaeological evidence ranges from sixth-century runic brooches to fifteenth-century rings inscribed with sophisticated Norman-French love verses or grammatical jokes.[584] Giving a ring at a betrothal probably originated in Rome and developed into ring exchange in the thirteenth century.[585] Inscribed rings were already popular presents in early Christian Byzantium.[586] Whereas fourteenth-century Jewish wedding rings inscribed with *Mazel Tow* probably belonged to the community and were borrowed by couples just for the wedding ceremony, thus making them symbolic ritual objects, not personalised gifts.[587] Posy rings increasingly appear as engagement gifts from the sixteenth century onwards.[588]

Literature, too, contains countless examples of jewelled belts or rings given by lovers, or for love.[589] Similar to political gifts, such presents also often express intimacy by inscribing the giver's name on the gift. Jewellery can be a public or more secretive declaration of love. Inscribed wreathes, for instance, are important in courtship. A particularly enigmatic example occurs in the poem *Von ainem Crantz* (at latest fourteenth century): A party of men receives wreathes with ostrich feathers, each bearing its recipient's initials—a convivial challenge to guess the presents' donors (643–645, 1–9). As a different kind of challenge, potentially less playful but more programmatic and explicitly meant to bind publicly, wreathes also occur within the courtly tradition of ladies adorning their knights. In *Der Jüngere Titurel* (no later than c. 1300), Sigune weaves Tschionatulander an inscribed wreath for his helmet that publicly proclaims she gave it to him as the crown of her maidenhood (1286, 1396). This wreath is referred to several times during Tschionatulander's quest to earn her love (1324f., 1411, 1427f., 1707). The inscriptions declare it as Sigune's gift and a symbol of her virginity, and connect it to his lance, which Sigune adorned with another band inscribed with her promise that if he succeeds she will exchange the wreath with a wife's headband, anticipating the lovers' union on a symbolic level (1243–1249).[590] Still, when they reunite, Sigune sends Tschionatulander off again, appealing to her

conditions as written on the wreath, and pointing out that the letters are still lacking battle traces, as if it was a legal contract to be signed with the material marks of the feats performed for her (1946–1947).

Connected to the motif of inscribed hearts in religious literature, engraved jewellery can also occur as an image for lovers' intimate inseparability and sincerity. In *Wilhelm von Österreich* (1314), the narrator mentions that Love has entwined Wilhelm's heart with his lady's like molten gold and sapphires, while she bears Wilhelm's name engraved into her golden heart, evoking the image that inscriptions in the materials of jewellery resist change and entangle different precious elements (12763–12780).[591]

In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1380), too, the couple talks of engraving each other indelibly into their hearts to express faithfulness (3.1485–1505). But this imagery changes when appearing in combination with the inaccessibility of the heart's secrets. When Troilus and Criseyde exchange rings—the most secretive form of jewellery given by lovers—the narrator claims he cannot say anything about the inscriptions, thus constructing a sphere of intimacy between the lovers that excludes even him: [*they*] *pleyinge entrechaungeden hire rynges* / *of whiche I kan nought tellen no scripture* (3.1368–1369). This tension between objects, verbal explanations, and the truth about the characters' actions and intentions intensifies in a later constellation. After the couple's separation, Troilus is left in agony about Criseyde's plans to return to him, until he discovers a brooch he once gave her on Diomedes's sleeve and realises she has a new lover (5.1037–1043, 5.1655–1666, 5.1688–1698). But the brooch does not reveal how and why Criseyde actually broke her vows to Troilus. The intimacy of rings inscribed with undisclosed secrets of faithfulness falls apart into silent, seemingly self-explanatory material objects on one side, verbal dream interpretations, letters and promises on the other, while the characters' true motives turn into blank spaces that cannot be read or known anymore.[592]

Similar scenes of lovers giving jewellery as farewell gifts appear often in courtly literature. Such items reflect the lovers' faithfulness and witness their vows of loyalty.[593] In the Norwegian *Tristrams saga* (c. 1250), Tristram inscribes the ring Isolde gave him at his departure with her words of farewell and puts it on the hand of her lifelike sculpture.[594] This moves beyond memorial purposes: When Tristram kisses and talks to Isolde's statue, he returns to the moment the ring's inscription encapsulates.

Losing jewellery linked to constancy usually bodes ill.[595] However, occasionally, it is passed on to authorise a messenger, as in the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* (388–393, 3433–3441, 3457–3474). Lovers also often use jewellery to identify themselves, in the face of challenges like a long absence or need for secrecy.[596] In the Middle English *King Horn* (late thirteenth century), Horn, an exiled prince, shows his lover princess Rymhild her parting present—a ring bearing her name in one MS, with the addition of "loves you" in two other MSS—when he returns in disguise in order to test her reaction to false news of his death before revealing himself (25f., 52–55). This is a trial of faithfulness, but Horn also puts himself, and the future of their secret engagement, into Rymhild's hands by returning the ring that symbolises their love and grants him magical invincibility (28, 68).[597] In contrast to such a fidelity test, in *König Rother* (c. 1160–1170), Rother, hidden among his enemies, slips a ring inscribed with his name into his wife's hand, not so much to reveal his identity, but to let her know he is present (3874–3914).

Such items often raise the question of how someone got hold of them—were they stolen, taken from the dead lover, entrusted to a messenger, or given away freely? Misunderstandings can have fatal consequences.[598] However, inscriptions do not seem to protect jewellery from such ambiguities; on the contrary, they sometimes even serve to deliberately create them. In some redactions of the short tale *Der Schüler von Paris* (thirteenth/early fourteenth century), a girl fabricates a story of an affair with a student in confession and sends the confessor to return an ornament she allegedly received from her lover. In actuality, it is all a trick to initiate the affair in the first place, to send the student a gift, and to inform him about her cunning plan for their first secret rendezvous.[599] The student in turn has a brooch crafted for her, which he asks the confessor to return: it contains an emblem of a maid shooting an arrow through a man's heart which, in redaction B of the "Gesamtfassung G", is encircled with the verses,

Ach reine süeze Minne,	Oh pure, sweet love,
Du gibest verborgene sinne	you grant hidden senses
Mangem kranken herzen,	to many an ill heart
Daz von der liebe smerzen	so that because of love's pains
Im erdenket solichen funt,	it can conceive such ideas
Der im sus selden würde kunt	it otherwise hardly could learn of
Und iemer mê wær tiure	and would be at loss for
âne dîner helfe stiure.	without your help's guidance.[600]
(466–474)	

Here we see that, despite its locomobility,[601] inscribed jewellery heavily relies on situational ties (especially to the relationships of the people involved). The fabricated background story turns the brooch into a gift sent back to symbolically end a relationship, using a rather commonplace inscription; but read within the true situation it appears as a counter-gift initiating a relationship, communicating that the student has understood the girl's ruse, and was only able to do so because he returns her love. Therefore, the situational ties of inscribed jewellery are not mere restrictions—they can creatively construct ambiguity and polyvalence, instead of exorcising it. In this instance, this effect allows lovers to communicate secrets hidden in plain sight.

Of course, love in medieval literature must not be confused with modern, romantic conceptions of love. Divisions between community and individual, private and public, are fundamentally different in the Middle Ages, something that the logic of gift exchange in love narratives can demonstrate. In dynastic marriages, jewellery can be an amatory, as well as a political marker. A wedding and coronation can be seen as the exchange of a ring for a crown that publicly re-defines the couple's relationship and political positions. The service of love and declarations of power converge in particularly interesting ways in inscribed crowns on helmets. The medieval German hero Lohengrin wears a helmet topped off with a crown whose gemstone letters declare he is fighting for the duchess of Brabant.[602] This introduces the stranger under a familiar name and defines his campaign as a service of love to his wife.

Thus, inscribed jewellery allows literature to entangle different spheres, such as politics, social standing, and love, and shows that in medieval literature some of these fields are hardly separable in the first place. However, there is yet another field central to such constellations of inscribed jewellery both on the level of material objects and practices as well as on the level of poetical language and rhetoric—that of religion.

2.4Religion

Medieval jewellery was often decorated with religious motifs, like crosses, and could be part of religious practices, such as rosary prayers. Cult objects could be worn as pendants, or be adorned with jewellery.[603] Jewellery with spiritual inscriptions expressing the relationship between God and believer occur frequently, such as *nomen ehlla fid in xpo* ("my name is Ella; my faith is in Christ"), *naine mi xps* ("negate me Christ"), or simply *AVE MARIA*.[604]

Inscriptions can also express communication with God. For instance, the visions of the mystic Gertrude of Helfta (twelfth/early thirteenth century) describe how in Heaven, whenever a believer prays to a saint, a corresponding gem Christ is wearing casts a beam of light inscribed with the believer's name on the saint.[605] However, since this article focusses on secular literature and leaves aside the vast body of religious texts, I will discuss the spiritual significance of inscribed jewellery in constellations interweaving social, political or amatory relationships.

Some Biblical verses connect adornment to vain worldliness (such as 1. Peter 3:3–6). But in others receiving (Ezekiel 16:11–39) or losing jewellery (Isaiah 3:16–23) occurs as a spiritual image for enjoying God's favour, which, in turn, is often expressed in the metaphor of being God's child or bride. Similar images occur in literary texts such as *Pearl* (late fourteenth century), *Die Hochzeit* (c. 1160), or the *Barlaam and Josaphat* material.[606] Jewellery inscriptions elaborating on the relationship between God and a believer mirror a range of human relationships. The *Gesta Romanorum* exempla mentioned above all relate jewellery given and taken by people to spiritual salvation. For example, the commentary on chapter 1 identifies the different characters presenting the princess with inscribed jewellery as figures for Christ. An eleventh-century Anglo-Scandinavian brooch explores instead the different ways jewellery can shape relationships: It bears the inscription "Ædwen owns me, may the Lord own her. May the Lord curse him who takes me from her, unless she gives me of her own free will" on its back.[607] The inscription, comparing Ædwen's relation to the personified brooch with her relationship to God, anticipates different ways of owning the brooch.[608]

Such images of jewellery-giving can also rely on political paradigms. *Ascension*, found in the Old English *Exeter Book* (probably tenth century) calls Christ the apostles' treasure-giver, and ring-giving appears as an image for spiritual allegiance.[609] The *Exeter Book* also contains two of the rare references to inscribed rings in Old English literature, which even draw on gift-circulation to describe a religious community. In "Riddle 48", a golden *hring* ("ring") silently declares "Heal me, helper of souls" to those who should put their faith in God (320). In "Riddle 59", a golden *hring* silently names its Lord so that people who understand will be saved, emphasising that many people are handling the ring (326f.). Often, both riddles are solved as referring to inscribed cult objects, usually chalices, communion patens, or bells. However, rings have also been suggested as a

possible solution.[610] *Hring* and *beag* also mean “bracelet”, “collar”, “crown”, “circle”, and could also be metaphors.[611] Nonetheless, independent of their solutions, “Riddle 48” and “Riddle 59” show that rings, when passed on, could weave relationships not just between people, but also between people and God. The first-person inscription in “Riddle 48” can be understood as the ring itself speaking the words constituting this community. The inscription materialises a shared prayer.[612] “Riddle 59” rather connects the ring to God. A pun on *ben* (“wound”) and *bén* (“prayer”) might connect the Lord’s wounds, which the ring might depict, to the letters carved into the ring’s body as speaking wounds.[613] If the *hrings* can save souls, they are powerful actants working on God’s behalf.

Similar metaphors of jewellery-giving can create another effect in connection to Mary as a noble lady or the Queen of Heaven. In the song *Mein trost, Maria, raine mait* (second half of fourteenth century), the poet imagines himself giving Mary a ring beset with the gemstone letters *JHESVS*, each interpreted individually.[614] The ring represents the year’s circle and the lay itself, given as a gift to the Queen of Heaven; the letters’ gemstone allegories connect to Christ’s life. Such examples can also intensify the connection between devotion and love. *Die Goldene Schmiede* (c. 1280), for instance, describes the angelic salutation *âvê* as God’s wedding ring to Mary (humanity) engraved with the Trinity’s image (1892–1915), thus connecting genealogical, amatory, political and religious commitment to the words of one of the most important prayers in spiritual practices.

Such combinations of hierarchical position with religious virtue are common in medieval poetic language, often occurring in amatory contexts (love being one of the highest courtly pursuits), and frequently using jewellery as an image for moral excellence.[615] Such items can bear moral or religious teachings.[616] On a rhetorical level, “crown” and “wreath” both occur as metonymies for excellence, especially concerning virtues, which makes sense if aristocracy is connected to moral superiority.[617] This can occur in combination with allegorical interpretations of the items’ materials. In Konrad von Würzburg’s *Die Klage der Kunst* (thirteenth century), the names of personified virtues appear on their crowns (stanza 6–12). *Der Ring* satirises such images in a made-up vision of Venus wearing a glass crown engraved with her name, along with the Virgin, who wears three interlaced crowns made of iron (inscribed as the crown of steadfastness), silver (chastity) and gold (salvation) (2286–2476). In *Wilhelm von Österreich*, two crowns topping off the hero’s

helmet even materially act out the connection between love, virtue, faith, and power: Wilhelm's first crown's gemstone letters spelling "CUPIDO" detach if its wearer lacks the virtues the stones represent (3899–3984, 4044–4129, 13874–14013). Hence, only a morally flawless knight can be crowned a servant of love. But the crowned helmet Wilhelm wins later supersedes this: Its gemstone letters form an extensive teaching about putting the service of God above everything else (13874–14013).

Some of the most complex examples of inscribed jewellery entwine religious, political, and amatory relationships in such ways. In addition to Chaucer's Prioress's brooch (discussed in the British Literature chapter) we also see this at the conclusion of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1390). Venus gives a black rosary covered with the golden words *Por reposer* to Amans when absolving him, so that he might pray for peace and write his book (VIII.2902–2970). This rosary in particular blends together the relationships between a servant and a queen, a lover and his lady, a penitent and his confessor, a believer and God, and a poet and his muse. The inscription then dedicates this charged gift to a specific purpose: The act of recovery and penance that brings all of these spheres together is the act of writing the *Confessio Amantis*; that is, writing poetry about love is a service and rosary prayer to love itself.

3Conclusion

In medieval literature, jewellery, understood as precious ornaments worn on the body, exceeds its aesthetical function. As a mark of distinction, jewellery can express hierarchy and social position. As a gift, it can create political power. It can also symbolise the direct relationship between two people, such as a lord and a servant or two lovers. Such constellations can produce narrative tension depending on how openly the relationship is connected to the community—as a wreath publicly worn, or a ring secretly given. Because jewellery is almost always concerned with relationships, it is crucial for an inscription's interpretation to ask which character gave what kind of item, with which history and obligations attached to it, to whom, under what circumstances, and how publicly. Inscriptions here do not serve as simple name tags—they can intensify and personalise gifts, pass on a giver's authority, or add new levels and ambiguities. On a synchronic level, one object can express different meaning to different characters, and can diachronically change its function,

just as an inscription's significance is related to situational and material aspects. Characters can use this to send messages hidden in plain sight. Inscribed jewellery that entwines different spheres is particularly interesting—for example when a poet imagines giving his poem as a ring of love to the Queen of Heaven.

This article focussed on how inscribed jewellery entangles political, social, amatory and spiritual functions. I hope to encourage more research on aspects I could only mention here, such as the way inscribed jewellery can create and work with power, or a perspective on gender and power.[618] Questions of media, intermediality, and *Schriftbildlichkeit* ("notational iconicity"), promise further insights into the relation between engraved images and inscriptions.[619] A complex corpus invites research on the role of jewellery in spiritual literature. Approaches informed by intertextual or material culture studies would illuminate the connections between jewellery and other material objects such as weapons or architecture. Actor Network Theory especially promises to be useful for understanding the agency of jewellery.[620]

Another, last field would be the relation between jewellery appearing as material items in narration to jewellery in figures of speech, and the relations between jewellery and poetry in general. Some connections can be concretely material—as with the famous Alfred Jewel, a gold-and-enamel-wrought crystal inscribed *AELFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN* ("Alfred had me made") probably used as a text pointer.[621] In the early fifteenth century, diamond rings were used to carve inscriptions upon glass.[622] Manuscripts also could be decorated like jewellery.[623] Jewellery frequently appears in texts as a reward for poets.[624] But the connection can also lie on the level of literary language. Wisdom and God's word can be described with images of jewellery.[625] Similar imagery also occurs for the value of literature itself, often in prologues or epilogues because of their metapoetical potential.[626] *Diu Crône*'s epilogue calls the text a crown for worthy people, the *Ring*'s prologue (probably 1408/1410) compares itself to a ring teaching wisdom about the world, while the poet of *Die goldene Schmiede* wishes he could melt gold in his heart and craft a jewelled poem to praise the Virgin, honouring Gottfried von Straßburg as a master-smith of golden poems.[627] Some descriptions of jewellery even reflect upon the fact they are poetic creations made of words, not metal.[628] Such moments of explicit literary self-reflexivity set up material reality against literary constructs of material objects only to then intricately entwine them.

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A Cabinet of Curiosities

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A Cabinet of Curiosities

Ricarda Wagner

Introduction: In Excess

Before scholars programmed databases to make visible and accessible the minute details of their research to peers and grant-giving agencies, amassing and exhibiting a wide array of material things in order to show one's comprehension of the world was a well-established practice in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Men of letters and science established awe-inspiring personal collections encompassing a bewildering variety of objects that were housed in "cabinets of curiosities" or *Wunderkammern*. Some of these material things were natural specimens, such as the dinosaur bones in the possession of the Danish polymath Ole Worm. Others were extraordinary artefacts that displayed human ingenuity, like automata, for example, or promised mystical insight, such as the Egyptian obelisks collected by the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher.[629] Others, still, displayed evidence of the preternatural in the form of unicorn horns or the remains of monstrous births.

The first major cabinets were born of a happy eclecticism, a wild urge to collect all manner of oddities, which were then displayed haphazardly, leaving it to the onlooker to find connections between an insect enclosed in amber and a Mayan mask. Later collectors, influenced by new developments in taxonomy and the increasing differentiation of knowledge into separate fields, instead preferred a more organised approach that properly classified objects and established relations between standard and eccentric exhibits.[630] Rather than following this approach that collects as a way of ordering the world, our literary *Wunderkammer* reaches back to the early cabinets and their antiquarian inclinations that focussed on the weird, seeking out those objects that inspired curiosity and awe, impulses that shake our sense of mastery over the material world. While the rest of this volume strives to establish a coherence, cataloguing inscribed artefacts according to their geographical provenance, function and material substance, here we offer a small miscellany

of singular things that resist our taxonomies. One of a kind, they represent not all the world of medieval literary inscriptions, but some of its most eccentric manifestations: an inscribed horse, a speaking ship that sails across time, etchings on an apple, a diamond dog leash, a crystal altar-as-bed, a magical message-bearing chair, and the legendary Holy Grail. These objects epitomise what Lorraine Daston refers to as "talkative things": "Talkative things instantiate novelty, previously unthinkable combinations. Their thingness lends a vivacity and reality to new constellations of experience that break old molds [...] [T]he new thing becomes a magnet for intense interest, a paradox incarnate. It is richly evocative; it is eloquent".631

We offer this collection of eloquent things as an appendix to our volume that, like the early modern cabinets of curiosities, explored the intersections between textual culture and material experience.632 As Derridean supplements to our classifications of many inscribed objects familiar because of their ubiquity, these particular talkative things incite estrangement, reminding us that in the end things exceed the stories we tell about them, reaching beyond pen and parchment.

Michael R. Ott

Equine *écriture*

The story of Floris and Blancheflour, well known in several medieval vernaculars, is not only a story about love, youth, and nobility, but also a tale of precious and potent things. As far as the German version by Konrad Fleck (c. 1220) is concerned, one of these things is actually an animal. When Flore departs from his royal parents and homeland to search for his beloved Blanscheflur, he is equipped with a unique horse. This horse is perfect in every respect, and it is delightfully (and naturally) coloured: its coat is white on one side and red on the other, with a pitch-black line in between that is three fingers broad, starting at the horse's forehead, traversing its back, and ending in a tail in which, according to the narrator, nature has mixed the colours red and white.

Of course, there is more to this horse than its colouring. Chivalric culture is strongly entangled with horses; the audience of courtly literature certainly knew a lot about them and, justifiably, expected equine nuance. Indeed, the subsequent description of Flore's horse goes into some detail, exceeding today's common knowledge about horses and related

terminology. But what makes for a rather excessive description today certainly met the expectations and expertise of thirteenth-century readers and listeners. The horse's head (*houbet*, 2758), so we are told, was small, its legs (*gebeine*, 2760) were strong, its pastern upright (*hôhevizzelîchen fuoz*, 2761), its ribcage (*bruste*, 2766) solid, its flanks (*lanken*, 2767) adequately thin, and its haunches (*goffen*, 2768) round. And "it was as much faster than the other horses as it was more beautiful" (*er was vor den andern snel / als vil als er schoener was*, 2770f.).[633]

Since this horse is obviously a marvel of nature, it is hard to imagine how any artifice could further increase its quality and excellence. The text's answer to this challenge is to present writing as a natural phenomenon:

nû hoerent wunder, man las
geschriben an sînen sîten
'mich sol niemen rîten
wan der wert sî der krône'.
das was von nâtûre schône
entworfen âne mannes list.
(2772–2777)

Listen to marvels now! One could read, written onto his flank: "nobody may ride on me but he who his worthy of the crown". This was by nature beautifully fashioned without men's skilful action.

Letters on the flank of a horse, written without human agency, are wondrous enough. But the entanglement of nature and culture does not end with this marvel. Letters written on animal skin indicate a manuscript culture that also aims to communicate. The inscription does not merely decorate the already impressive horse; nor does the message relate only to the animal. The inscription on Flore's lettered horse transforms the animal itself into a test, ultimately restricting the entanglement of horse and rider to just one person. The perfect horse is not just given to Flore, it is made for him, and the inscription prescribes this association between the hero and his new steed. After all, Floris's power and nobility are not purely man-made, the result of personal excellence and heroic deeds, but are also a naturally given fact, published by nature in writing.

Christine Neufeld

The Ship of Faith

Malory's *Morte Darthur* contains many notable inscriptions, the most remarkable of which is the Ship of Faith in Book 17 of the Tale of Sankgreal, a relatively faithful translation of *La Queste del Saint Graal* (the fourth branch of the thirteenth-century French Arthurian prose cycle). Here Galahad is reunited with Perceval

and Bors, and introduces his fellow knights to his mysterious companion, who reveals herself as Percival's sister. They journey together on a mysterious ship, engraved with "*two fayre lettirs wrytten, which seyde a dredefull worde and a mervaylous: 'THOU MAN WHYCH SHALT ENTIR INTO THYS SHIPPE, BEWARE THAT THOU BE IN STEDEFASTE BELEVE, FOR I AM FAYTHE. AND THEREFORE BEWARE HOW THOU ENTIRST BUT IF THOU BE STEDEFASTE, FOR AND THOU FAYLE THEREOF I SHALL NAT HELPE THE.'*[634] On board the ship the knights examine an assortment of marvellous objects, including a sword, scabbard and girdle, all bearing inscriptions that far exceed their material capacities. On the poorly made girdle, for instance, we find the following elaborate text:

> *HE WHYCH SHALL WELDE ME OUGHT TO BE MORE HARDY THAN ONY OTHER, IF HE BEARE ME AS TRULY AS ME OUGHTE TO BE BORNE. FOR THE BODY OF HYM WHICH I OUGHT TO HANGE BY, HE SHALL NAT BE SHAMED IN NO PLACE WHYLE HE YS GURDE WITH THE GURDYLL. NOTHER NEVER NONE BE SO HARDY TO DO AWAY THYS GURDYLL, FOR HIT OUGHT NAT TO BE DONE AWAY BUT BY THE HONDIS OF A MAYDE, AND THAT SHE BE A KYNGIS DOUGHTER AND A QUENYS. AND SHE MUST BE A MAYDE ALL THE DAYES OF HIR LYFF, BOTH IN WYLL AND IN WORKE; AND IF SHE BREKE HIR VIRGINITÉ SHE SHALL DY THE MOSTE VYLAYNES DETH THAT EVER DUD ONY WOMAN.*[635]

From the prosopopoeic vessel personifying Faith to the inscriptions on the sword and its accessories which warn, challenge, prophesise and prompt accounts of past events (with this memorial function creating complex biographies for the artefacts themselves), the Ship of Faith episode is the apotheosis of inscriptionality in Malory.

Interestingly, two thirds of the inscriptions found in Malory cluster around the storylines of Balin le Sauvage and Galahad, plotlines bound together by Balin's sword, which Merlin inscribes and sends to Arthur's court in a red marble stone for Galahad to claim.[636] These inscriptions function variously according to the categories established in this volume. The many inscribed tombs fixed in the Arthurian landscape rewrite, as Kenneth Tiller argues, the histories of the knights and ladies along the lines of an incipient code of chivalry.[637] The locomobile inscribed objects—swords and scabbards, as well as furniture like the Siege Perilous—function as object tests that chart narrative trajectories by revealing individual identities, creating relationships, and propelling heroes to their destinies. The Ship of Faith, however, complicates these categories. As a ship, it is locomobile in that it is designed to move through space: its journey from Logris to Sarras

transports the Grail knights definitively out of the secular into the sacred realm, just as their embrace of Faith by boarding the vessel transforms them from knights errant to spiritual pilgrims. However, as a ship built by King Solomon containing messages for future generations its persistence through time also gives it the memorial function of locostatic markers designed to anchor individual and communal identity. Its ancient provenance, furthermore, highlights that the inscriptions appearing in the Arthurian world can come from different sources.

Merlin's metafictional role as an author figure through his inscriptions in the Balin episodes is replaced in the Galahad plot by a divine hand writing the destinies of the Grail knights.[638]

The importance of this shift is highlighted in the Ship of Faith episode by the prominence given to the act of inscribing through the portrayal of the origin of the ship's inscriptions. Whereas in some versions of the *La Queste del Saint Graal* (Bodley Rawl. 814, for example), Solomon only reads the writing on the ship upon waking, Malory's Solomon witnesses the angel inscribing the words into the ship in his dream. The direct citation of the inscription at its moment of creation repeats (in a slight paraphrase) a text Malory's readers have already read, authoritatively linking biblical past and Arthurian present:

> *THAT nyght lay Solomon before the shippe with litill felyship. And whan he was on slepe hym thought there com from hevyn a grete company of angels, and alight into the ship, and took water whych was brought by an angell, in a vessell of sylver, and besprent all the shippe.*
>
> *And aftir he came to the swerde, and drew lettirs o[n] the hylte. And aftir wente to the shippe-bourde, and wrote there other lettirs whych seyde: "THOU MAN THAT WOLTE ENTIR WITHIN ME, BEWARE THAT THOU BE FULLE IN THE FAYTHE, FOR I NE AM BUT FAYTH AND BELYVE".*
>
> *Whan Salamon aspyed thos lettirs he was abaysshed, that he durst not entir, and so drew hym abacke; and the shippe was anon shovyn in the see. He wente so faste that he had loste syght of him within a litill whyle. And than a voyce seyde*:
>
> *"Solomon, the laste knyght of thy kynred shall reste in thys bedde".*[639]

This is the only moment in the *Morte Darthur* when our attention is drawn to the act of inscription itself. Merlin's inscriptions, as Kathy Cawsey has observed, function more as magical writing in which the technical act itself remains obscured.[640]

Malory's focalization of the act of inscription in Solomon's dream recalls a similar episode in the apocryphal *Vita Adae et Evae*. Esther Quinn has already related this legendary material to the *Queste* in her examination of the rood-tree legend that

informs the other significant (though uninscribed) artefacts, the bed and spindles, on the ship.[641] I propose that there is another aspect of the legend at play in the Ship of Faith episode. In the apocryphal legend Solomon also dreams about an act of inscription: the two tablets of clay and stone on which, at Eve's command, Seth inscribed the lives of the first parents, his hand guided by an angel.[642] Solomon's dream about an angel inscribing the ship thus invites Malory's audience to recall the first inscribed objects of cosmic history, a divinely sanctioned missive whose material perdurance manifests the possibility of grace. In Galahad, the last of Solomon's lineage and achiever of the Grail, the story begun by Seth's account of the Fall—humanity's quest for reconciliation with the divine—is accomplished, if only on an individual level. For those left behind, the destiny inscribed into the landscape remains much more ambiguous; for the remaining inscriptions' authorship is neither attributed to Merlin's political orchestrations, nor clearly a divine intervention. This would not be so perturbing, given how few inscriptions follow the Ship of Faith, if it were not for the fact that it renders even more mysterious the most famous Arthurian inscription of all, along with the figure whose destiny it portends: *HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS*.[643]

Michael R. Ott

The Apple of Discord

Are inscriptions gendered? Of course, they do not have a gender themselves, but are they concerned with gender categories and do they interact with them? In search of an answer we may turn to the "Apple of Discord", an extraordinary script-bearing artefact with a long tradition. The basic story is well known and easy to retell: Jupiter invites all the gods and goddesses to the wedding of his sister Thetis and the Greek prince Peleus. Only one goddess, Discordia, the goddess of discord, receives no invitation. In order to take revenge, Discordia approaches the wedding ceremony invisibly and throws an apple between three distinguished attendees: Juno, goddess of power, Pallas, goddess of wisdom, and Venus, the goddess of love.

At least, this is how Konrad von Würzburg describes the matter in his unfinished *Trojan War*, written in the late 13th century. Konrad also describes Discordia's apple in some detail, revealing an extraordinary script-bearing artefact that cannot easily be compared to more realistic inscribed items, such as

weapons, tombs, walls, or tablets. Observed closely, the apple sparkles to such an extent that no single colour can be fully captured visually—though all colours are there, as the narrator is eager to explain. Looking at it from a distance, the apple appears to consist of two amalgamated halves, one made of gold and the other made of silver. At the intersection of these two halves is a green circlet, one finger wide, made of tiny emeralds. This circlet bears writing, crafted out of many-coloured pearls, which always appears in the language of the particular reader. The inscriptions on the circlet says:

swelch frouwe sî noch hiute
diu schoenste ûf disem veste,
sô daz an ir kein breste,
noch kein wandel werde schîn,
der eigen sol der apfel sîn,
noch anders keines wîbes.
ir muotes und ir lîbes
muoz si wesen ûz erwelt
und für die besten sîn gezelt,
diu von der hôchgezîte spil
mit ir den apfel füeren wil.
(1454–1464)

The lady who today, at this celebration, is the fairest, showing no deficiency and no fickleness, to her the apple shall belong—and to no other woman. Regarding her attitude and her appearance she who likes to take the apple with her has to be excellent and she has to rank among the best.[644]

After reading the inscription, every one of the three goddesses lays claim to the apple. Although the inscription's semantic sense would likely instigate a fight, it is not just the text and its message that cause discord. The inscription, the narrator explains, is also a spell, causing each reader, regardless of her initial disposition, to estimate herself to be the fairest and most illustrious. This leads to an even more serious conflict. If the inscription induces a contest, the enchantment turns this contest into an inextricable situation.

The subsequent story line is equally well known: the three women have a heated argument and turn to Jupiter for help. Jupiter, however, shuns the conflict and the decision and turns to Paris, a nearby shepherd, renowned for his impartial and just rulings. Eventually, Paris awards the apple to Venus—and much havoc ensues.

The disastrous apple and its inscription are gendered for at least two reasons. First of all, it divides characters according to their gender: women on the one hand and men on the other. Indeed, Jupiter and Paris show absolutely no interest in owning the apple. Both of them are only concerned with a solution to the dispute. This is because, second, the inscription is explicitly directed at women alone and also determines important aspects of femininity: beauty and good behaviour. And the magic spell

ensures that the goddesses, and not the surrounding men, keep to these standards—standards that, in the first place, are intended to cause conflict and chaos. That is why the inscription on the Apple of Discord can be said to be gendered.

Michael R. Ott

The Diamond Dog Leash

Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Titurel*, written around the year 1220, is exceptional for several reasons. First of all, we know of no source Wolfram has adapted. This is noteworthy because Wolfram's other epic texts, his *Parzival* and his *Willehalm*, rely, like most German courtly literature of this time, on French sources, albeit in a very autonomous and creative way. The second peculiarity is linked to the first: Wolfram's *Titurel* picks up minor characters from *Parzival* and gives them a back-story, very much like Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* expands on *Hamlet*. Actually, Wolfram von Eschenbach is working on a "story world", and others follow his lead, like Albrecht von Scharfenberg with his so-called *Younger Titurel*, written about half a century after Wolfram's text. These two distinct features already mark *Titurel* as an experiment; and this perception also matches the form, because the text is written in complex stanzas invented for this very poem. It is not surprising considering its status as an experiment that only two fragments of *Titurel* survived. Even though we do not know for sure, it is perfectly possible that Wolfram never wrote more than these two fragments.

We are most interested in the second of the two fragments, which focuses on a young girl and a young boy who are about to learn what love is. The young man with the fancy name Schionatulander catches a run-away hunting dog. We know for a fact that historically these dogs typically had long leashes. But this particular leash is special. It is "a good twelve fathoms long, the braid-silk of four colours [...] ornamentally wrought together".[645] When the silk leash is unfolded, "script could be perceived on it, on the outside and the inside", with letters "of emerald, mingled with rubies" as well as "diamonds, chrysolites and garnets".[646]

While the girl Sigune begins reading, the narrator explains that "the leash had been sent to a prince for reasons of love"[647] as a gift and love letter with its own transportation device. This animal 'device' went astray, following the blood trail of a wounded animal. To keep hold of the hound, Schionatulander

fixes the leash to the pole of a tent. Sigune, however, wants to read the letter to the end and so she unknots the leash only to have the hound run away again. In her attempt to detain the animal Sigune cuts her hand. Deeply affected by the text, Sigune promises Schionatulander her love on the condition that he brings the leash back to her. Although Schionatulander tries, he dies soon afterwards when he is confronted by a knight in the forest. However, we only learn of this fatal outcome in *Parzival* when the young hero encounters Sigune cradling the dead body of Schionatulander like a Pietà.

Fashioning a leash as a script-bearing artefact is exceptional, especially a leash so beautiful and costly. But the fascination of the second fragment stems not only from the artefact and its materiality but from how it stages and reflects the complexities of communication, writing, and reading. The extent of this complexity becomes apparent, for example, when readers learn that the hound got away from the message's recipient that same day and that the content of the communiqué closely mirrors the situation of Sigune and Schionatulander. The materiality of this text is compounded by its entanglement with the world of the animal. Moreover, this is a text that makes itself felt; it wounds Sigune, mingling her blood with that of the prey scented by the hound in the mind of the audience. This complex interlocking of the characters' fates, in connection with an intricate narrative and an extraordinary artefact offers a profound reflection on textuality, unique for its time.

Michael R. Ott

The Crystal Bed

The "cave of lovers" (*Minnegrotte*) in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan and Iseult* is one of the most iconic scenes in a story that certainly does not lack memorable sequences. What makes it stand out from other scenes is its status as an extensive allegory, followed, moreover, by the narrator's allegorical interpretation —"the first explicit allegorical exegesis performed in German secular poetry", as Haiko Wandhoff reminds us.[648] Not surprisingly, the cave has been discussed in detail by numerous scholars, "leading to the well-established notion that in it is buried the key to a proper understanding of the entire romance".[649] Yet, many have overlooked—or only mentioned in passing—the rather inconspicuous inscription on the crystal bed that Tristan and Iseult share during their pleasant exile. This bed

signifies, the narrator explains, the transparency of love.

To be sure, there are few inscriptions in Gottfried's work and so one might easily overlook this one. But since the bed and its inscription constitute the very centre of the cave, we may want to treat the writing as significant. In fact, the inscription presents an exegesis before the exegesis and, therefore, microcosmically mirrors the macrostructure of the whole scene.

Before we take a closer look, a little background may be helpful. Tristan and Iseult were banished from court because they were unable to hide their mutual attraction from Marc. Consequently, he suspends their community of three and lets them leave to live their lives as a couple. After two days, Tristan and Iseult arrive at a cave which Tristan once found while hunting. This cave, the narrator explains, had been hewn into the mountain by giants before the advent of Christianity. The giants went there for privacy and intimacy. The cave is round, large, upright, white, and all-around plain and even. It has a magnificent lock and a marble floor, green like grass. In the middle of this structure, there is a bed,

gesniten schône und reine	nicely and neatly cut
ûz kristallînem steine	out of crystal,
hôch unde wît, wol ûf erhaben,	elevated and large, well erected,
alumbe ergraben mit buochstaben;	all around engraved with letters
und seiten ouch die mære,	which likewise told
daz ez bemeinet wære	that it was dedicated to
der gotinne Minne.	the goddess of love.[650]
(16721–16727)	

The letters recount what the narrator has already stated. But they also explain to the new inhabitants the purpose of the bed and—since the bed is its centre—the purpose of the cave as a whole. Indeed, the inscription transforms Tristan and Iseult into readers who can give meaning to their new home. But the inscription does not only inform the couple and echo information about the cave's designation. The dedicatory inscription transforms the cave into a semi-sacred space, since it clarifies that the bed is also an altar to Venus. And as an explication of the cave's purpose the inscription therefore also anticipates the later exegesis of the narrator who likewise does what the Tristan and Iseult may do: He reads the cave and inscribes it with meaning.

Maria Krümpelmann and Tamara Ludwig

The Perilous Seat

A wide spectrum of inscribed artefacts appears in the narrative world of the *Prosa-Lancelot*, a Middle High German translation of the anonymous Old French *Lancelot Grail Cycle* (thirteenth century). As one of the major sources of the Arthurian Legend, it recounts the story of the rise and fall of King Arthur, the adulterous romance of Lancelot and Guinevere and the quest for the Holy Grail. Particularly curious inscriptions manifest themselves on the so-called Perilous Seat, a hazardous and wondrous object playing a key role in the constitution of the Round Table, around which the king and his knights regularly congregate and take counsel. Throughout the narrative, the general rules of awarding seats at the Round Table undergo meaningful changes. When a recluse questions Iwein about the current fashion of allocating seats, he recalls the old customs under King Uterpandragon where a knight was only invited to sit at the Table when exhibiting an injury on the face (cf. V, 610, 18–29). During Arthur's reign, this custom has been abandoned and the king has made it his personal judgement to grant a seat as an expression of a knight's special worthiness (cf. III, 614,8–14), rendering the table a medium of assembling the best knights. The idea of the Round Table now more than ever highlights the marked absence of hierarchical power structures. As an elevated place with no head, it conceptualises the ideal of chivalric order as a state of unbroken equivalence and unity among its members.

With the arrival of Lancelot, Galahot and Hector at Court, nearly all the seats at the Round Table appear to be occupied for the first time, hinting at the impending start of the Quest for the Holy Grail. However, one empty seat remains, defying the picture of homogeneity: common knowledge at the King's Court has it that one seat at the Round Table, at times referred to as the Perilous Seat (*Sorglich Seß*, V, 14,32), at others as the Wondrous Seat (*Wunderlich Seß*, V, 154,32) or as the seat "at the very back" (*hindersten seß*, IV, 412, 25), must remain vacant until the person it was crafted for—its *meister* (master, V, 14,36)—arrives. The king cannot wield any authority over it; and even Lancelot, who is praised as excelling all the other knights in terms of chivalry and virtue, does not venture to come near it, daring only to sit next to it (cf. IV, 410, 31).

The Perilous Seat's preeminent status becomes brutally apparent when Brumal, an overconfident knight makes the mistake of putting its unavailability to the test. Due to a feud between their respective families, Brumal denounces Lancelot for not having the courage to sit on the Perilous Seat. But, on that very day, a fresh inscription appears on the seat as if by magic,

proclaiming Brumal's impending death: *Alhie muß off dißem hutigen tag sterben der hochfertig Brumal; und stirbt er nit, so hatt Merlin gelogen in syner prophecye*, ("On here the proud Brumal will die today; and if he does not die, Merlin lied in his prophecy", IV, 410,33–35). In spite of the inscription—or possibly in acceptance of his fate—Brumal sits down on the seat, screams in anguish and is dramatically reduced to ashes by shots of fire falling down on him (cf. IV, 414, 13–27). Whether he is actually killed by a higher power at work in that instant or whether the seat itself is transformed into a sort of vicious "killing device" is left to the reader's imagination here. In any case, King Arthur does not think it necessary to mourn for Brumal's death, although he was acclaimed as an honourable knight earlier by the crowd (cf. IV, 412, 16–19). After all, it was known that the Perilous Seat can only be occupied by one knight. Anyone trespassing this rule must be considered a fool (*ein groß dorheit, davon ich noch nye han hören sagen*, "the greatest folly I have ever heard of", IV, 418, 15f.).

Soon afterwards, Lancelot perceives a curious change in the Round Table's condition. When he examines the seats one at a time, he notices that they all suddenly bear name tags: *Hie sol der siczen, dort sol der siczen* ("Here, this one shall sit, and over there that one", V, 14, 29f.). Whereas a very different inscription appears on the Perilous Seat: *Vierhundert jare und vierundfunffczig nach dem das gott gemartelt wart, an dem pfingsttag so sol dieser seß synen meister finden* ("454 years after the Passion of Christ, at Pentecost, this seat will find its master", V, 14, 34–36). By conceptualising the coming of the elected knight as in line with salvation history, the inscription lends to the Round Table's endeavours a Christian legitimacy, reinforcing the Seat's own auratic status.

The new prophecy on the Perilous Seat instantly causes a flurry among the knights. After some hurried calculations, they are sure that the day the inscription is talking about must be today. Instructing the others to cover the words with a silken cloth, Lancelot hides the message from view in order to await the king's arrival. When all the knights are gathered at the Round Table, every seat with the exception of the Perilous Seat is taken once again. In that moment, an old man clad in white leading a red knight by the hand wondrously enters, declaring that he has brought the long awaited knight. After delightedly greeting his guest, Arthur invites the new knight to sit on the only vacant seat —the Perilous Seat. When the silken cloth is lifted off the seat, the knights see that yet another inscription has manifested itself

there: *Hie ist Galaat seß* (“This is Galaad’s seat”, V, 22, 27). Rejoicing, the knights of the Round Table know that the knight who will complete the Quest for the Holy Grail has finally arrived!

The various forms of extraordinary writing appearing on the Perilous Seat aptly display how script may intermittently transform a mere household item into an object with striking agency. Within the egalitarian structure of the Round Table, the Perilous Seat acts as a producer of hierarchy. By repeatedly unsettling the chivalric order, it is the seat itself which effectively marks Galaad as the best of all the knights and appoints him as the only one able to conclude the Quest. With the subsequent integration of Galaad into the Round Table, the Perilous Seat returns to its object status and its inscription aligns itself with the others. In the end, it has become a seat like any other.

Ludger Lieb

The Holy Grail

At the end of the twelfth century two notions of the Grail are familiar: In Robert de Boron’s *Joseph d’Arimathie* (c. 1190–1200), the “Holy Grail” is the very chalice of the Last Supper in which Joseph, standing under the cross, collected Christ’s blood. In his *Perceval, le Conte du Graal* (c. 1190) Chrétien de Troyes on the other hand describes the Grail as a golden dish, preciously decorated but otherwise used as tableware (3220: *Un graal*), in this case to contain the Host. Wolfram von Eschenbach’s version of the Grail distinguishes itself from these two concepts of the sacred vessel. In his *Parzival* (c. 1205), Wolfram, although translating Chrétien’s *Perceval*, turns the Grail into an amorphous *dinc, daz hiez der Grâl* (“thing called the Grail” 235,23) and gives it a number of new features, including the fact that inscriptions appear on it several times. Only with Wolfram does the Grail become a script-bearing artefact.[651]

I would like to emphasise three aspects of Wolfram’s approach to the inscribed Grail in the following discussion: a) the materiality, b) the practices and c) the writings.

a) In a single passage of only (approximately) 80 verses (469,3–471,26) Trevrizent, Parzival’s uncle, calls the Grail a “stone” 16 times. What is expressed here is, in fact, not so

much the material (the mineral substance “stone”) as its concreteness (the touchable thing “stone”, a kind of “geofact”): The Grail is a thing that is locomobile and not further worked on. The actual materiality of the Grail can only be understood indirectly. Trevrizent reports that already at the fall of Lucifer God sent the so-called neutral angels to the Grail (471,15–22). That must have been shortly before or shortly after the creation of the world, certainly before the creation of humanity. Therefore, the Grail is a divine ‘artefact’ from the time of creation. It is a thing, the materiality of which cannot possibly be grasped with human terms.

b) Due to this unknown, somewhat peculiar materiality there are also practices connected with the Grail that are rather strange. The Grail, for instance, is carried through the hall of the Grail castle during feasts in a para-religious procession; and the Grail itself decides who is virtuous enough to be allowed to carry it. The Grail provides food and drink at a banquet and shields anyone who looks at it from death for a week. A dove that places a Host on the Grail every Good Friday replenishes its agency. The unmarried ladies and knights at the castle look after and protect the Grail. So carrying, eating and drinking, looking at, looking after and protecting are practices related

to the Grail. Finally, there are the practices of writing and reading, which brings me to the next and last point.

c) Writing and reading are unusual here in at least four ways. First of all—as with the writing on the wall in the Book of Daniel—the writer is missing or, at any rate, nobody can see who or what is producing the script. As the writing appears to function magically, one naturally assumes that God, an angel or some higher being is writing on the Grail. Secondly, the writing does not leave any permanent traces on the material; rather, the letters disappear again when the addressees have read them. The narrator emphasises this phenomenon by commenting: *die schrift darf niemen danne schaben: | sô man den namen gelesen hât, | vor ir ougen si zergât* ("No one needs to scrape the written off: it melts before the eyes after one has read the name [or the words]"). Thirdly, this phenomenon makes it possible to re-write on the artefact several times in the same place. Fourthly, the script consists of the names of those called to the Grail (Knights of the Grail, the King of the Grail) and of instructions for action that apply very specifically to individual situations rather than presenting permanent mandates. The writing on the Grail thus does not correspond at all to a typical inscription on an object, but apparently replaces an oral (monological) communication.

The writing that appears on the Grail is thus a kind of 'remote communication' that uses a medium that has a virtual surface, an interface with a transcendent sphere. For medieval culture, this Grail is sufficiently alien and fascinating at the same time, because it transcends the 'usual' limitation of the written to 'ordinary' materiality and to 'normal' practices of production and

reception—and at the same time confirms their validity. The same applies to perhaps the most curious aspect of Wolfram's Grail: The inscribed Grail is itself the subject of another highly unusual inscription, written *inme gestirne* ("in the stars" 454, 23)[652] and read by a pagan man whose writings were the first to tell of the Grail. They became the source of the source that Wolfram claims inspired his own text. Bound in the imagination to the transcendent and the celestial, as well as to the political and mundane, Wolfram's Grail is thus a worthy contribution to a cabinet of curiosities.

Michael R. Ott

Epilogue: Making Connections

Curiosities, assembled within a "cabinet of curiosities", may all look different and miscellaneous, but they have at least one thing in common: they traverse conventional epistemologies, conventional configurations of knowledge and conventional scientific arrangements. Indeed, that is why such objects were assembled in the first place. The above cabinet of strange and unusual narrated inscriptions was certainly established in this manner. And just like the historical *Wunderkammern*, our cabinet lacks order and taxonomy, challenging us to consider how and why these extraordinary script-bearing artefacts trouble our traditional epistemologies.

Christine Neufeld's comments on the Ship of Faith may give us some important hints. The locomobile inscribed objects on this ship, she explains, "function as object tests that chart narrative trajectories by revealing individual identities, creating relationships, and propelling heroes to their destinies". To me, this idea of narrative trajectories, encapsulated in script-bearing artefacts, is a key argument, connecting several of the curiosities assembled above.

Reading inscribed artefacts as narrative trajectories reveals them to be interfaces that connect things, characters, and futures (which in medieval literature often means destiny)—and the artefacts bear witness to this connection via script. Our curious "talkative things" reveal factual connections and establish knowledge about the underlying structure of a particular story world. In so doing, these script-bearing artefacts traverse different epistemological sections of these medieval story worlds, especially materiality, human and non-human characters, temporality, and space. Take Flore's horse, for example. This

marvellous creature reveals Flore's place in the world by virtue of its own outstanding qualities. The inscription publishes, as I have observed, a naturally given fact, a truth traversing human and non-human characters. Or take the Grail, this kind of "remote communication", linking a higher being commanding the past, present and future, to the mortal world. The Grail, as it is fashioned by Wolfram von Eschenbach, furthermore bends the potentials of common, man-made materials and suspends spatial distance as a necessary component of written communication.

Or, as a last example, take the Perilous Seat. Just like Flore's horse and the Grail, the script-bearing seat marks the place of one extraordinary person. And just like the Grail, the inscription evolves, proving their legitimacy and truth and, later, revealing its legitimate owner. Just like the leash in *Titurel* and the Apple of Discord the seat brings to an end any notion of an open future in favour of destiny, a destiny embodied by the script-bearing artefact. Again, epistemological sections of the story world interlock, notably the temporal structure, the material integrity of a rather ordinary object, as well as the relationship and association of human characters.

Therefore, if we wonder why all these artefacts assembled above do not fit neatly into the other chapter's narrations, we might ask if this is because we have problems grasping the significance of these epistemological anomalies, whose trajectories are all the more difficult to trace because they move off the archival page, beyond pen and parchment.

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- Polo de Beaulieu, Marie-Anne 1f.
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- *La Quête du Saint-Graal* 1, 2, 3
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- – King Richard's spear 1, 2
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- Suchenwirt, Peter, *Di schoen Abentewr* 1f.
- *La Suite du Roman de Merlin* 1
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- *Vita Adae et Evae* 1, 2

- Vollmann, Benedikt Konrad 1
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- *Von den Buchstaben* 1
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- Wagner, Thomas Gregor 1
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- Wreath 1f.,2, 3f.

Endnotes

1 Panzer 1966. The project Panzer initiated is still ongoing, now under the aegis of various Academies of Sciences and Humanities in Germany: "Die Deutschen Inschriften des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit", http://www.inschriften.net/projekt.html (last accessed: 06. 06. 2018). Cf. also Ott 2014 on Panzer's ideas of an epigraphic philology.
2 Henkel 1992.
3 Ernst 2006.
4 Cf. Bennett 2010, 62–81 on the history of twentieth-century vitalism and its discontents.
5 Meskell 2013, 338.
6 Bennett 2010, 2, 13; emphasis in original. Cf. also her analysis of the North American power blackout of 2003 as an example for the collective failure of an assemblage, 24–28.
7 Focken et al. 2015, 129–134, esp. 132f. call this "profiles of materiality".
8 Bennett 2010, 23.
9 Deleuze/Guattari 1987. The term "assemblage" permeates *A Thousand Plateaus*, but is never explicitly defined. Deleuze/Guattari list a number of characteristics of the "*machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions" (88); emphasis in original.
10 Chaganti 2014 discusses medieval literary inscriptions with reference to *Gestalttheorie*. Cf. also Ricarda Wagner's article on tablets in this volume.
11 The distinction is Konrad Ehlich's; cf. Ehlich 1994.
12 For a more detailed discussion see Lieb/Ott 2014.
13 The term "affordance" was originally coined by the psychologist James J. Gibson and has turned out fruitful for a wide range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies. Cf. Fox/Panagiotopoulos/Tsouparopoulou 2015.
14 Cf. Kopytoff 1986 and Gosden/Marshall 1999.
15 Ferhatović 2013, here 201.
16 Cf. Hodder 2016, 13–18, who identifies a series of different "dependencies" between humans and things.
17 http://inschriftlichkeit.materiale-textkulturen.de/inschriften.php (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019).
18 Campbell/Mills 2012, 7.
19 Influential for the German discussion on translation and retelling has been Worstbrock 1999.
20 See Wandhoff 2003. Wandhoff's book is the most important recent contribution to ekphrasis in German.
21 Wandhoff 2003, 13–26.
22 For a more detailed discussion of our method see Lieb 2015.
23 Michael R. Ott's article on weapons provides a short summary of inscriptions in *Parzival*.
24 Morungen probably imitated the technique of epigrammatic (or, more specifically, epitaphic) writing used already in ancient literature and especially by roman love elegists (see Ramsby 2007; Keith 2011). Particularly Ovid's *Heroides*

contain a great number of epitaphic minded passages (2.147f.; 7.195f.; 14.129f.; 15.183f.).

25 *Ist aber ieman hinne, / der sîne sinne / her behalten habe? / der gê nach der schônen, / diu mit ir krônen / gie von hinnen abe; / Daz si mir ze trôste kome, / ê daz ich verscheide. / diu liebe und diu leide / diu wellen mich beide / vürdern hin ze grabe* (129,25). Unless an English translation is given with the text edition in the bibliography, the translations are ours.

26 For a comprehensive view of stone see Cohen 2015.

27 Lieb/Wagner 2017, 24.

28 Lieb/Wagner 2017, 24.

29 There are, though, three narrated inscriptions in poems by Hugo von Montfort. But he writes his poems around the year 1400 (about two hundred years later than Heinrich von Morungen). And his poems cannot be compared well with classical *Minnesang* (see Hugo von Montfort 2005, poems No 4 and 28). Christine Neufeld's article on architecture in this volume provides some details on inscriptions in Hugo von Montfort's work.

30 See especially the fundamental study of Petrucci 1998.

31 See Laura Velte's article about tombs and epitaphs in this volume.

32 For more recent thoughts on Gahmuret's grave see Lembke 2017.

33 Lieb/Wagner 2017, 21. Ricarda Wagner's article on tablets in this volume elaborates on the INRI inscriptions as a premodern post-it.

34 See Colliot 1973; Maddox 2000; and with special regard to the German version see Witthöft 2013.

35 The episode is probably based on Oenone's letter to Paris in Ovid's *Heroides* (5.21–32).

36 For a detailed discussion of these aspects see Laura Velte's forthcoming PhD thesis.

37 Ehlich 1994.

38 See Stock 2005; Klingner 2013.

39 For a comprehensive overview see Klingner/Lieb 2013.

40 See Lieb 2008, 193.

41 For more details and discussion see Ott 2015a.

42 Cf. Ricarda Wagner's chapter on tablets in this volume for more examples.

43 It is worth mentioning that the story and the script-bearing artefact show some similarity to Marie de France's lai *Le Fresne* which tells of the reunification of mother and daughter due to a script-bearing ring and a splendid brocade.

44 For a more detailed discussion of the tablet with regard to its entanglement of things and persons see Ott 2015b.

45 For Panzer and his project of Inscription Studies see Ott 2014.

46 See Henkel 1992.

47 See Ernst 2006.

48 See Lieb 2008; Ott/Pantanella 2014; See Lieb/Wagner 2017; Ott 2015a, 2015b.

49 See Lieb/Ott 2015, 2016; Ott 2017.

50 See Lieb 2015.

51 All eddic quotes refer to the edition by Neckel/Kuhn 1962. The translation used is by Larrington 2014. Translations of other Old Norse texts are my own, unless a translation is listed in the bibliography.
52 Already in 1117, however, a decision was made to record laws in Icelandic.
53 An overview of the origins of Old Norse literature, with particular regard to media and other aspects of textuality, has been presented by Glauser 2006.
54 Basic information on runes and runic inscriptions are offered in Düwel 2001.
55 Cf. Seim 2004, 121.
56 *Þa er Hakon konvngr reið vpp til Alreksstaða einn sunnodag or Biorgyn sem vandi hans var til. kom a mót honom einn hlavpanndi maðr akafliga af Ribbvngom. hann hafði rúnakefli i hendi þat sem einn Ribbvngr sendi konvnginom ok sagði sva at Sigvrðr Ribbvnga konvngr var andaðr*. […] *Konvngr let þegar gera bref austr til Knvtz frænda sins ok bauþ honom goða kosti sem fyrr* (*Codex Frisianus*, ch. 150, 464; the manuscript has been dated to the first quarter of the fourteenth century).
57 This refers to the aforementioned *Íslendingabók*.
58 *til þess at hoegra verði at ríta ok lesa, sem nú tíðisk ok á þessu landi, bæði lǫg og áttvísi eða þýðingar helgar, eða svá þau in spakligu froeði, er Ari Þórgilsson hefir á boekr sett af skynsamligu viti, þá hefi ek ok ritit oss íslendingum stafróf, bæði látínustǫfum ǫllum þeim er mér þótti gegna til várs máls vel, svá at rétt ræðir mætti verða, ok þeim ǫðrum, er mér þótti í þurfa at vera, en ór váru teknir þeir, er eigi gegna atkvæðum várrar tungu*. (*First Grammatical Treatise*, 12f.).
59 Cf. Düwel 2001, 12, 95–97, 153–160.
60 For references to the individual termini, see the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* of The Arnamagnaean Commission at the University of Copenhagen: http://onp.ku.dk (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019).
61 *Alexanders saga* is an Old Norse translation of *Alexandreis* of Gualterus de Castiglione (c. 1135 until post 1184), which was translated and commented by the Icelandic abbot Brandr Jónsson in c. 1260.
62 For this see Ebel 1964.
63 *Den tredje og fjærde grammatiske afhandling* 1884, 37.
64 *Heimskringla* (literally "the Earth's circle") is a history about the Norwegian kings composed by Snorri Sturluson around 1230. In the first part, *Ynglinga saga*, Nordic gods are euhemerised and depicted as magically gifted humans.
65 See the commentary by von See et al. 2006, vol. 5, 572–592.
66 Some consider Rígr as Heimdallr, some as Odin; cf. von See et al. 2000, vol. 3, 486f., 508f., 514–516.
67 For this, see also Dillmann 2003, 544.
68 Jürg Glauser has proposed that this motif testifies to the change of media from non-scriptural, non-verbal to verbal signs: in the older *Atlakviða*, Guðrún sends a ring wrapped in a wolf's hair as a warning to her brothers while in the younger *Atlamál*, the ring is replaced by the runic message. The prosaic re-narration in *Völsunga saga* combines the two codes and represents the written code as potentially deceptive (Glauser 2006, 16f.).
69 *Fóstru átti Þorbjǫrn ǫngull, er Þuríðr hét; hon var mjǫk gǫmul ok til lítils foer, at því er mǫnnum þótti. Hon hafði verit fjǫlkunnig mjǫk ok margkunnig mjǫk, þá er hon var ung ok menn váru heiðnir; nú þótti sem hon myndi ǫllu týnt hafa. En þó at kristni væri á landinu, þá váru þó margir gneistir heiðninnar eptir* (ch. 78, 245).
70 *Alfræði íslenzk*, vol. 3, 109.
71 On the conception of presence in medieval cultures, and its usage on script and script-bearing objects, see Hornbacher/Frese/Willer 2015.
72 On the stanzas featuring the curses, see von See et al. 1997, vol. 2, 106–137. A quite similar application is also known by Odin, for example, who puts an insanity spell on the giantess Rindr to beget an avenger for his son Balder with her (Saxo

Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* 2015, 164f. [lib. III iv.4]).

73 *The Poetic Edda* 2014, 194; *Guðrúnarkviða ǫnnur* 21–24: 21 *Foerði mér Grímildr / full at drecca, / svalt ok sárlict, / né ec sacar munðac: / þat var um aukit / urðar magni, / sva[l]kǫldom sæ / oc son<ar> dreyra* 22 *Vóro í horni / hvers kyns stafir / ristnir ok roðnir / —ráða ec ne máttac—, / lyngfiscr langr, / lanz Haddingia / ax óscorit, / innleið dýra*.

74 *Alfræði íslenzk* 1917–1918, vol. 3, 88.

75 *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðaálfs* 1941, 726. The *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðarálfs* is part of the first part of *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga* (The saga of King Olav the Saint). The discussed section originates from the manuscript Holm perg 1 fol (Bergsbók) from the early fifteenth century.

76 Such as for example the sarcophagus of St Stephanus (according to the *Icelandic Homily Book* from c. 1200, fol. 95v$^{17–19}$).

77 In Östergötland, on the rune stone from Rök from the ninth century, which features the most extensive (and still not conclusively interpreted) inscription of around 750 runes, a stanza in the eddic verse metre refers to a king named Theodoric (the Great?; Düwel 2001, 114–118); the stone from Karlevi from Öland (from around 1000) commemorates a Danish Viking leader (ibid., 134) in the most elegant and difficult skaldic verse metre *dróttkvætt* ("court tone").

78 See von See et al. 2019, 666–669.

79 For such secondary functions of script, see Geier 1994.

80 For this aspect, see Ehlich 1994.

81 *Egils saga* 1933, ch. 78, 242–267.

82 Nonetheless, several scholars assume that such a transmission was plausible for an audience of the thirteenth century; see for example Holm 1975.

83 *"rísta eptir kvæði því er ek vil yrkja um athafnir mínar ok ævi* […] *en þeir rísta eptir á speldi"*; *Qr-var-Odds saga* 1888, 195; this passage is preceded by a drinking competition with accompanying quarrels, during which a number of stanzas are recited and carved into a board by the princess and her advisor, see ibid. 169. In ch. 62 of *Grettis saga*, an Ævikviða of a giant is mentioned which is carved by his daughter into a wooden log (*Grettis saga* 1936, 203).

84 The majority of manuscripts of *Egils saga* transmit only the first stanzas of *Sonatorrek*; only one redaction in two transcripts from the seventeenth century features the whole text (*Egils saga* 1933).

85 For this, see Perkins 1969.

86 A preliminary note to our translations and choice of editions: All translations are our own unless otherwise indicated. They will be cited with line numbers in parenthesis in the body of the text. For the Middle English texts, we have chosen to use primarily editions from the TEAMS Middle English Text Series. These online scholarly editions are readily accessible to an international audience through the Robbins Digital Library Project at the University of Rochester, http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019).

87 See Ramey 2013, 335–337.

88 Zweck 2016 explores the paradoxes of speech and silence in the Exeter Book Riddles.

89 See Symons 2016, 3–10 for the uses of the runic letters in Anglo-Saxon England. For the runes as speech see also Katja Schulz's chapter on Old Norse in this volume.

90 Strictly speaking, the set of letters used to record vernacular writings in Anglo-Saxon England was a modified Roman alphabet that included additional characters to represent sounds specific to Old English, such as æ, ð and þ. Our use of the term *Latin alphabet* in this chapter refers to this Anglo-Saxonised set of Roman letters.

91 See Clements 2017, 23 with further literature. She argues for a reading of the name stones as pages of a manuscript. Cf. also Maddern 2013, 1–51 for an

introduction to Anglo-Saxon name stones.

92 See Greenfield 1966, 170.

93 See respectively Page 1999, 101f.; Symons 2016, 75; Niles 2003, 203.

94 Bragg 1999.

95 See Klinck 1992, 208.

96 Niles 2003, 207–211, translating as “the open sea” and *ond* “a happy wife and man”.

97 Niles 2003, 194.

98 Niles 2003, 196. Cf. also Foys 2012, 144–146, who reads the runes in the context of media studies.

99 See Symons 2016, 4 and 80.

100 Klinck 1992, 57f. offers possible alternatives for the identity of the speaker, which depends on the reconstructions of these lines at the beginning of the poem, where the manuscript is badly burnt.

101 Cf. Zweck 2018, 18. Describing the same phenomenon with different terminology, Page 1999, 169 calls inscriptions that refer to their own form or materiality "self-evident".
102 See Paz 2013, 247.
103 Lerer 1991, 171–174.
104 Bosworth-Toller, s. v. *run-stæf*, http:// bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/026047 (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019).
105 Frantzen 1991, 344.
106 Schrader 1993, 142–146.
107 Johnston 2016, 212.
108 Paz 2013, 249.
109 See Paz 2013, 243, who explicitly likens Beowulf to the giants.
110 See Christie 2011 on the Anglo-Saxon fascination with alphabets and secret letters.
111 In the explanatory notes to his EETS edition of the poem, Gollancz observes that the connection between this OE and ME term for "mystery" with the Old Norse *rūn* is "difficult, though attractive". See Christie 2011, 148.
112 *Queintĭse* (n. d.). In *Middle English Dictionary Online*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED35510 (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019).
113 See Skemer 2006.
114 *Richard Coer de Lyon* is based on a lost Anglo-Norman original. There are seven manuscripts dating from the early fourteenth to the late fifteenth centuries. For more on weapon inscriptions see Skemer 2006, 108.
115 For more on the subject see Smalley 1952, Janowitz 2002, and Kieckhefer 1989.
116 See Lucas 1994.
117 The Old English poem is found in the Junius manuscript (early tenth century). But its author and date of composition are unknown.
118 See Gower *Confessio Amantis* 5,7017–7025; See Chaucer, Monk's Tale 2203–2235, in *Canterbury Tales*.
119 MacMullen 1982.
120 See Okasha 1971 for a hand-list of objects from Anglo-Saxon England inscribed with the Roman script. Page 1999 discusses runic inscriptions, mainly on metal and stone. See Clements 2017, 20–30 for commemorative inscriptions.
121 See Archibald 1991, 3–6 and 45–51 for the transmission of the Apollonius story in the Middle Ages.
122 The manuscript reads *mearm stane*, with the *r* partly erased and the *e* expuncted. As Muir notes, the scribe's difficulty with this word might suggest that marble was a rare material in Anglo-Saxon England.
123 There are five redactions of the *Apocryphal Lives of Adam and Eve*, all stem from the eighth-century *Vita Adae et Evae*, which itself is based on the account by Flavius Josephus in *Jewish Antiquities*. The medieval treatments change the pillars in Josephus to tablets. Furthermore, the account traces the tablets to King Solomon, who prays to God to understand the foreign script and learns of their provenance. As with Belshazzar's Feast, discussed above, the act of inscription itself becomes a kind of miracle, in which divine will forcibly carves out its message on recalcitrant material.
124 See Tatlock 1974. "Canny" here refers to an obsolete Scots term: 5b: "Lucky, safe to meddle with; *esp*. with the negative". That is to say that the stones are unlucky. "Canny", adj. (n. d.). In *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from www.oed.com/view/Entry/27143 (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019).
125 The violated princess cannot benefit from Apollonius's wit, as his flight from the King's assassins apparently forecloses any possibility of her rescue through a

publication of the scandal. Her fate remains a loose narrative thread; we can only assume her release comes through the lightning bolt that kills Antiochus and allows Apollonius to accede to the throne.

126 Safran 2011, 118.

127 The CRC database allows one to compare English and German Alexander legends, for example; *Floris and Blauncheflore* to Konrad Fleck's *Flore und Blanscheflur*; the Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn* to Middle English *King Horn*.

128 See Okasha 1971. For more on the ring, see Christoph Witt's chapter on jewellery in this volume.

129 Unlike all other Middle English romances, this fifteenth-century poem is known only through printed editions.

130 See J. Allan Mitchell's introduction to his edition for the Middle English Text Series (Mitchell 2007).

131 See Mitchell 2007.

132 Although a major work of the medieval English literature, Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, with its multitude of inscribed objects, is not discussed in this chapter since these objects appear first in Malory's French sources. For scholarly considerations of inscriptions in Malory see: Boulanger 2009 and Cawsey 2001. Also illuminating is Robeson 1997, which places Malory's inscriptions in conversation with both French sources, as well as Chaucer and medieval drama.

133 Pearsall 1970, 169–183; see also Sponsler 2004, Cornell 1988–1991 and Chaganti 2012.

134 See Trapp 1955 and Davis 2017.

135 Self-promotion through inscriptions in stained glass appears to be a particular provocation for Langland given that he has Patience return to this critique again in Passus 2,14,197–199.

136 For a detailed discussion of this topic, and of the figure of Philomela discussed below, see Ludger Lieb's chapter on textiles in this volume.

137 Note that John Gower also specifies that Philomela weaves a white silk cloth that contains both letters and images in *Confessio Amantis* 7,2350–2365.

138 *Crafti*, adj,. (n. d.). In *Middle English Dictionary Online*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED10153 (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019). See also Pearsall 1970 on Lydgate's treatment of Criseyde, 134f.

139 Bougne 2011.

140 Cawsey 2004.

141 Miller 1982, 95.

142 Middleton 1978, 119.

143 Middleton 1978, 99.

144 Due to the lack of linguistic standardisation, *Old French* refers to a number of different dialects and thus different writing traditions, such as Picard, Lorrain, Burgundian, Champenois and Walloon. Anglo-Norman, one of the most productive variants, arose after the conquest of England by the Norman William the Conqueror in 1066. From a historical viewpoint, Old French refers to the time between 842, the year of the Oaths of Strasbourg, and the mid-fourteenth century, when, through considerable linguistic changes, *Middle French* started to take shape.

145 Cf. Gaunt 2013.

146 The quoted passages have been identified through a comparative approach whereby inscriptions in German and English medieval texts were compared to their French model. Furthermore, we have found passages with narrated inscriptions via dictionaries of Old French, namely the *Dictionnaire Étymologique de l'Ancien Français*, where specific lexemes can be traced back to their corresponding sources. Finally, we are grateful to Stephen Dörr for valuable hints to further references and for his helpful comments.

147 Unless they are listed in the bibliography, the translations are ours.
148 David Morgan mentions *paizas* as part of the communication system. Morgan 1986, 104–106.
149 Anne Wilson adds to this that “the bestowal of the sword by the Fisher King may be a recognition of sonship by the king” (Wilson 1990, 134).
150 Wilson 1990, 119f.

151 Cf. also Michael R. Ott's chapter on inscribed weapons in this volume.
152 Kelly 1994, 518.
153 Weiss 1999, 1.
154 Cf. Kopytoff 1986, 91–94.
155 Wright 1874, 280.
156 See also Laura Velte's chapter on tombs and epitaphs in this volume.
157 Cf. Assmann 2003, 171.
158 Assmann 2003, 171 also mentions a case like this.
159 In his book on *Ancient Prophecy*, Martti Nissinen analyzes the function of prophecy in ancient and biblical texts—also with regard to inscriptions. He justifies the significance of prophecy by its being "triggered by uncertainty, and its purpose is to become conversant with superhuman knowledge" (Nissinen 2018, 12).
160 Ott and Pantanella describe the relation between inscriptions and storyline and the effects that inscribed texts can have on the outcome of a story as "narrative potential" (Ott/Pantanella 2014, 331).
161 Mario Roques comments: "Lancelot y soulève sans peine l'énorme dalle du tombeau réservé à celui qui délivrera les prisonniers (c'est-à-dire, en fait, à lui-même)" (Roques 1958, XIII).
162 According to Jutta Eming, this memorial scene should be considered as the key episode in the romance since Flore later breaks with his parents and decides for himself to go to the Orient to look for Blancheflor, cf. Eming 2006, 144.
163 In the Middle High German version we read: *hie lît Blanscheflûr diu guote,* | *die Flôre minte in sînem muote,* | *und sî in ze gelîcher wîs.* | *sî was sîn friunt, er ir âmîs* (2110–2114). In the Middle English text is says: *Here lyth swete Blaunchefloure* | *That Florys lovyd par amoure* (217f.).
164 Plato, *Phaedrus* 1998, 86, 275d–e. Cf. Ehrlich 1994, 31.
165 The example of a narrated false inscription is interesting in comparison to real false inscriptions, which also existed in the Middle Ages. Wilhelm Wattenbach mentions tablets of lead on which the legend of Saint Valentine was inscribed. Since we have no narration here that delivers a context we cannot find any reflection on the medium of text itself. The real false inscription is nothing more than the attempt to deceive the reader in reality, cf. Wattenbach 1875, 44.
166 In her illuminating article, Sandrine Hériché-Pradeau proposes the opposite claim when she describes the close relationship between text and image. She writes: "Envisager, comme nous l'avons fait dans ces quelques romans en prose, l'inscription dans sa dimension figurative, l'inscription auprès de l'image, l'inscription sur l'image ou l'inscription après la disparition de l'image permet le déploiement d'un faisceau de problématiques reliées entre elles, mais qui ouvrent, également, chacune à un champ de réflexion autonome, s'étendant de la valeur matérielle et iconographique de l'inscription à sa valeur transfigurative" (Hériché-Pradeau 2013, 400f.).
167 Brigitte Schlieben-Lange does not mention inscriptions at all as a source for a reflection on writing in the Middle Ages: Schlieben-Lange 1994, 108.
168 Strubel 2009, 138.
169 As to some of the differences and common points between the Greek myth and Guillaume's narrator cf. Lucken 2012, 124.
170 Strubel 2009, 139.
171 Cf. on the ideas of texts as mirrors in the Middle Ages: Bradley 1954, 100–115. Furthermore cf. *Le Roman de la rose*, 59–60.
172 About the book as symbol in European medieval literature see Curtius 1948, ch. 16.
173 The notion of *scrittura esposta* was elaborated by Armando Petrucci; it deals with any type of writing conceived to be placed in a "posizione propriamente 'esposta' agli sguardi dei frequentatori di quegli spazi, al fine di permetterne la

lettura a distanza, anche collettiva", see Armando Petrucci 1997, 45–58. See also Petrucci 1985, 85–97. Considering the specificity of this category, which is linked with a specific tradition of studies, I have preferred here to keep the Italian term.

174 The expression *visibile parlare*, which Dante uses to allude to the dialogues that take place between figures depicted in a bas-relief, appears in *Purgatory* X, 95: *Colui che mai non vide cosa nova / produsse esto visibile parlare, / novello a noi perché qui non si trova* ("he, whose ken nothing new surveys, produc'd / That visible speaking, new to us and strange / The like not found on earth"). On ekphrasis in Dante's work, see Lombardo 2009, 99–120. In Italian studies, Dante's expression has been used to refer to texts that include pictorial vignettes or that are written on a medium other than parchment and paper. See Ciociola 1992 and Pozzi 1997, 15–41.

175 In Italy various research projects are aimed at the linguistic study of medieval epigraphs, as for example the *Epigraphic Vernacular Database* (Nadia Cannata/Luna Cacchioli/Alessandra Tiburzi 2019). A study of medieval Latium epigraphy is in D'Achille 2013, 19–117. On the Venetian inscriptions, see Tomasin 2012, 23–44.

176 On medieval *scritture esposte* see Casapullo 1999, 193–200 and Koch 1999, 399–429; for the following centuries, see D'Achille 2008, 279–307 and the panorama outlined by Francesca Geymonat 2014, 57–100. On the catacomb of Commodilla, see Sabatini 1987, 7–34.

177 See Miglio/Tedeschi 2012, 605–628 and Tedeschi 2014, 363–381.

178 See Testa 2014.

179 Robert Favreau states that "[e]pigraphy has very often been defined as the science of what is written on a durable material and, in fact, inscriptions are most often drawn on stone, on metal. But the support is in itself indifferent: embroidery, tapestry, glass (stained glass), pottery, bone, stucco, wood, slate, etc., and some of these supports are not strictly speaking resistant or durable. To define epigraphy, one must therefore start not from the form, but from the functions of the inscription. […] Epigraphy is the science of what is written—it is its etymology—in order to communicate some element of information to the widest public, and for the widest duration" (Favreau 1997, 5, TdA).

180 See Petrucci 2010.

181 According to Cardona 1981, 56–60, these must also be considered among the *scritture esposte*: private inscriptions (e. g. inscriptions in a ring), ephemeral inscriptions (e. g. inscriptions in sand or written without ink), "epiphanic" inscriptions (like the *mene, tekel, peres* in Daniel 5:26). On epiphanic inscriptions, see §§ 4f.

182 See Centini 2016, 38: "la parola, sia essa voce generatrice o scrittura, giungendo dalla divinità può assumere le valenze caratteristiche del suo creatore e di conseguenza possedere essa stessa il potere di potere alla vita quanto evoca".

183 Here we find several magic formulas for healing certain diseases or producing magical rites. Often these formulas must be written on pieces of cloth, on animals' organs or on somebody's skin. See § 5.

184 Depending on the articulation of various criteria (the relationship between inscription and images; the relationship with the reader; the communicative function), Sabatini comes to identify several concrete types of inscriptions: 1) explanatory captions of "stories" (also with dialogic inserts), 2) texts integrated into figurative representations and involving the reader and/or the author, 3) statutory texts (and similar), 4) inscriptions of dedication, commemoration, ex voto, 5) inscriptions of warning, pride, insult, threat or invitation (see Sabatini 1997, 185).

185 Here we refer to the concept of discursive tradition elaborated, on the basis of Coseriu's linguistic theories, by Brigitte Schlieben-Lange and Peter Koch, in reference to the genres and types of text, written and spoken, as well as to the discursive universes (religion, science, history, etc.) and to those communicative

norms that cannot be ascribed to the norm of a single historical language, but which constitute the expressive knowledge of a given individual or groups of individuals. See Schlieben-Lange 1983 and Koch 1997, 43–79; see also Wilhelm 2001, 467–477.

186 Tuscan is the variety for which we have more documentation, also because of the particular economic and social conditions that led to the development of a very fertile literary environment in medieval Tuscany specifically, which reaches the height of its prestige in the fourteenth century thanks to the figures of the *Tre Corone* (Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio). For a periodization of the Italian language see Tesi 2001, 8f.

187 I provide a loose translation of those works for which it was not possible to find an English translation.

188 Here is the French source, the *Roman de Tristan en prose*: *et avoit letres en l'ymages del cavalier, qui disoient: "C'est l'ymage de monsigneur Tristan", et en l'autre: "C'est l'image de madame la roine Yseut"* […] *Et el plat de l'espee avoit fait faire li rois letres qui disoient: "Monsigneur Tristan". Et en l'autre, qui faite estoit en samblance de dame, avoit letres el pis qui disoient: "Madame Yseut"* (V, II/9, § 85, 202f.). It should be noted that in the Italian manuscript the names *Tristan* and *Isolde* are always abbreviated.

189 Murgia 2015, 11–50.

190 For the meaning and the sources of this motif, I refer again to Murgia 2015, 28–30.

191 *Iuxta quod est memoria Cesaris, id est agulia, ubi splendide cinis eius in suo sarcophago requiescit* […] *Cuius memoria inferius ornata fuit tabulis ereis et deauratis, litteris latinis decenter depicta. Superius vero ad malum, ubi requiescit, auro et preciosis lapidibus decoratur, ubi scriptum est: "Cesar tantus eras quantus et orbis sed nunc in modico clauderis antro et hec memoria sacrata fuit suo more, sicut adhuc apparet et legitur"* (*Mirabilia urbis Romae*, 18; see Cesare D'Onofrio 1988, 72). For more on the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* see Christine Neufeld's chapter on architecture in this volume.

192 For additional analysis of this passage see Michael R. Ott's chapter on weapons in this volume.

193 Ciociola 1992, 72.

194 On the topic, see Ricci 1997, 433–458; Gorni 2003, 1–16; Giunta 2007, 149–167; Carrai 2010, 481–510. Carrai in particular thus expresses itself on the presence of the epigraphic genre in the *Commedia*: "È superfluo dire che il poema di Dante non è affatto una raccolta di epigrafi, altrimenti non avremmo di fronte la Commedia, ma i Tumuli di Pontano. […] La commedia non equivale a una sorta di lapidario o di Spoon river anthology medievale, dal momento che il modello pur pervasivo degli epitaffi costituisce sì una funzione portante, ma riassorbita in un progetto più vasto, visionario e narrativo" (Carrai 2010, 501).

195 Giunta 2002, 134f.: "trapianto diretto, non mediato, […] non solo di un contenuto cristiano […] ma anche di una forma che appartiene al sistema della comunicazione cristiana".

196 In the city of Dite there is an expanse of tombs from which come the cries of heretics, which Dante depicts as dead among the dead. In fact, Dante gives particular prominence, especially in Canto IX, to a very precise type of heresy (the Epicurean one) that denies the immortality of the soul.

197 See the discussion in Bertolini 1970.

198 *Facilis descensus Averno*: */ nodes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis*; */ sed revocare gradum, super-asque evadere ad auras / Hoc opus, hic labor est*.

199 See Ricci 1997, 452f. See also Christine Neufeld's architecture chapter in this volume.

200 See Ricci 1997, 452–458.

201 See also Malato 2005, 20. See also Christine Neufeld's architecture chapter in this volume.
202 The images are taken from Dante Alighieri (1979), vol. III, 306–307n.
203 On this subject, see also Malato 1970, s. v.
204 On real inscriptions inspired by Dante's model, see Claudio Ciociola 1992.
205 See Picone 2002.
206 *Intrate per angustam portam, quia lata porta et spatiosa via, quae ducit ad perditionem, et multi sunt, qui intrant per eam; quam angusta porta et arta via, quae ducit ad vitam, et pauci sunt, qui inveniunt eam!*
207 See Claudio Ciociola 1992; Brugnolo 1992, 305–339 and Ricci 1994.
208 Ricci 1997, 438f.
209 See Paolo D'Achille 2017, 346–372.
210 For an overview of medieval chronicles in Italy, see Porta 1995, 159–210; Gualdo 2013, 5–29 and the contributions collected in Francesconi/Miglio 2017.
211 On this type of political art, see Donato 1992, 341–396.
212 Suitner 1983.
213 On vernacular hagiography in the Middle Ages, see the contributions collected in De Roberto/Wilhelm, 2016, esp. the introduction to the volume (De Roberto 2016, 1–19). See also the studies in Albonico/Bock 2017.
214 For a discussion of the tablets of law see Ricarda Wagner's chapter on tablets in this volume. For a discussion of the epiphanic writing at Belshazzar's Feast see Christine Neufeld's chapter on architectural inscriptions in this volume.
215 Polo de Beaulieu 1991, 297–312 and Polo de Beaulieu 2000, 217–326.
216 For another discussion of the saint and this topos see Stephanie Béreiziat-Lang's and Michael R. Ott's chapter on inscriptions on body and skin in this volume.
217 See also De Roberto 2018, 177–189. On medieval miraculous literature in the vernacular, see De Roberto 2019.
218 For an in depth discussion of this episode see Stephanie Béreiziat-Lang's and Michael R. Ott's chapter on inscriptions on body and skin in this volume.
219 Both quotations are taken from Lombard texts edited in Wilhelm/De Roberto 2019.
220 Here and below I use + to indicate the sign of the cross.
221 The following three excerpts are all taken from Gal/Boudet/Moulinier Broggi 2017. The codex collects many medical recipes as well as magic and astronomical treatises. About Latin and Romance magical inscriptions see also Barbato 2019.
222 See Giove Marchioli 1994, 263–286.
223 For a short linguistic overview, see Cichon 2012, 3–7. Due to the expansion of the Castilian dialect during the *Reconquista* and *Repoblación* campaigns, this variety could already substitute Latin in administration, historiography and laws during the thirteenth century under the Crown of Fernando III and Alfonso X, cf. Cichon 2012, 5. See also Penny 1991. While Eberenz 1991 distinguishes the period between 1450 and 1650 as a "middle"-Spanish variety, Cano Aguilar marks the beginning of a linguistic register "of the Austrias" in 1475 (2004, 659). In his influent study *El Español a través de los tiempos*, Cano Aguilar observes a "fundamental variation in the fifteenth century" (19922, 219), but includes this century into the "Castellano Medieval."
224 Old Catalan develops as a proper vernacular language (linguistically close to Occitan) in the territory of the Principado de Catalunya, the Valencian Kingdom, the Balearic Islands and Sardinia. For the evolution of medieval Catalan, see Rabella 2012. Like Castilian, Catalan also founded its linguistic hegemony by a political and administrative expansion. From the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, the Crown of Aragón increased the efforts of a royal "scriptural" administration, see Gimeno Blay 2006 and Aurell 2012.

225 Symptomatic is, for example, the fact that Alfonso X signs both the Castilian Historiography *Estoria general* and a poetic cycle of Gallego-Portuguese religious songs (*Cantigas de Santa María*).
226 See the variants of the fourteenth-century Spanish and Portuguese *Crónicas*. For the example of the Portuguese king Afonso Henriques, see Videira Lopes 2005.
227 For the problem of narrativity, see White 1981.
228 For the appearance of magic writing in chivalric romances, or the practice of text-bearing vestment in courtly contexts, see section 4 and 5 of this article.
229 This approach involves selective database research: key-word searches related to the semantic field of writing and inscription on the one hand (letters, verbal forms of "to write"), and material supports for writing and potentially text-bearing artefacts on the other (arms, textiles, body parts etc.) (see also Iris Roebling-Grau's and Sascha A. Schultz' article on Old French in this volume). For Spanish texts, searching in the CORDE database of Real Academia Española, *Corpus diacrónico del español*, http://www.rae.es (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019), with around 250 millions of registers. The Gallego-Portuguese counterparts (CIPM, Corpus informatizado do Portugues medieval; or: TMILG, Tesouro Medieval Informatizado da Lingua Galega) do not offer a comparable quantity of sources yet. Even without producing an exhaustive ontology, this key-word research permits insights into the very rich variation of the phenomenon for the chosen time period, even if recurrences show privileged, somehow "topical" configurations of material writing. It is logical that a database research can only be a secondary complement to a deeper understanding of the broader textual structures and logics (only available through close reading of entire text corpora). Moreover, we have to be aware that the quantitative approach is necessarily limited as it is dependent on the completeness and the implicit compilation criteria of the respective databases.
230 Aurell 2012 and Gimeno Blay 2006.
231 For the modelling of epitaphs in Portuguese kings' chronicles, see Lang 2017, 87f.
232 The recurrence of narrated inscriptions transported in Iberian translations of classical antique texts (for example Juan Fernández de Heredia's *Traduccción de Vidas paralelas de Plutarco*, c. 1380) shows that the presence of text-bearing architectonic elements could be considered, in the fourteenth century, a cultural aspect of the remote antique world and a result of cultural import.
233 See the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, and the scene of Afonso Henriques's battle at Ourique in *Crónica de 1344*. For a purely iconic, alternative writing in the form of the hero's wounds, Barros Dias 2005. Here, the influence of mystical inscription is obvious, see chapter 4 of the present article.
234 See ch. XI *De cuemo poblo Pirus a Ossuna et a Granada et del rey Rocas* up to ch. XIII (12f.). For this concrete episode, see Riquer 2017; more generally, Fernández-Ordóñez (ed.) 2000.
235 The Alfonsine governance is famous for its attempt to enlarge and renew the bibliographic tradition, translating and transcribing a large corpus of occidental and oriental texts. The same can be said about the Catalan monarch Pere III el Cerimoniós, see Gimeno Blay 2006.
236 All translations are mine.
237 A prominent example of an architectonic inscription program is the Granadian Alhambra, see Puerta Vílchez/Núñez 2011.
238 Although the original Castilian text dates from 1251, the two manuscripts in Biblioteca del Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial (signatures h-III-9 and x-III-4) are from the fifteenth century. Döhla, who juxtaposes in his critical edition the two manuscripts as A and B, opines "que el ms. A data de principios del s. XV, y el ms. B […] de 1467" (Döhla 2009, 67).

239 Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, Ms Z-I-2. I follow the critical edition of John J. Nitti 1980.
240 See my article on fetishism in the colonial space and its relation to material writing, "Materialización y metapoética desde las novelas caballerescas a la épica colonial" forthcoming in *RILCE*.
241 For a classical approach on Iberian Imperialism and textual logic, see Quint 1993.
242 See the "Pròleg" in Llull 2015, 9–14. Concerning the figure of the *Arbor exemplificalis* from a literary/aesthetic point of view, see Hauf 2002. For the literary modelling in Ramon Llull more generally, Friedlein 2004 (for *Llibre del Gentil*, especially 2004, 59–98).
243 See the critical introduction 2015, lv–lix.
244 For a programmatic "transmutació de la ciència en literature" (Pring-Mill 1991, 307), also see the newer article collection on Llull's *Arbor Scientiae* (Domínguez Reboiras/Villalba Varneda/Walter (eds.) 2002). For mechanics and "ars combinatoria", see also Vega Esquerra 2016.
245 On this paragraph and the problematic of textual monuments within the fictional world, see my article Béreiziat-Lang 2018b. On *Blanquerna* as apologia see Friedlein 2004.
246 See Gumbrecht 2004.
247 *Visión Deleytable* has been shown to be influenced by the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (twelfth century, Córdoba), whose writings reflect the Jewish and Arabian philosophies of the time, just as Llull's own texts also do (cf. Girón Negrón 2000).
248 For a broader Iberian perspective on this phenomenon, see my analysis of the Portuguese *Boosco deleitoso*, in my article Béreiziat-Lang 2018b.
249 We find parallel examples in *Visión deleytable* 1991, 107 (text-bearing tablets) or 116 (text-bearing flowers), among others. It is revealing that those inscriptions are mostly hold in Latin, while the running text is in Castilian.
250 See Carruthers 2008, 60–65; Hahn 2000; Folger 2003 and 2016, 233. Yates 1999, 173–198 discusses the art of memory in Llull in particular.

251 Malkiel 1959, 413.
252 See especially Malkiel 1959 and for a newer approach, Hook (ed.) 2015 and Sharrer 1994, 175–190. For the diffusion of the "Matière de Bretagne" on the Iberian Peninsula, Mérida Jiménez 2013, 13–34.
253 Sharrer 1994, 175. Malkiel (1959, 406) gives 1170 as a first date, in relation to the Catalan troubadour Guiraut de Cabrera, who mentions the "literary fashion" of Arthurian themes because of his familiarity with the Provençal scope.
254 The oldest Castilian chivalric book *Libro del Caballero Zifar* (c. 1300), for example, shows motifs from *Yvain*. Likewise, *La Faula* (c. 1370) written by the Majorcan Guillem Torroella is a creative adaption of different Arthurian motifs; and *La gran conquista de Ultramar* (c. 1295) picks up scenes from the *Chanson du Chevalier au Cygne* and makes allusions to the Round Table.
255 See Mérida Jiménez 2013.
256 This adaption (ed. Bohigas, 1957–1962) also contains traces of Hélie de Boron's *Conte de Brait*. For the "re-writing" of the French *Suite du Merlin* in this Castilian text, see the exhaustive comparative study of Rosalba Lendo. She notes several important modifications like "suppression ou modification de certains épisodes, moralisation de divers passages, réduction ou rationalisation des éléments merveilleux, transformation de quelques personnages. Ces modifications témoignent du caractère mouvant du roman arthurien" (Lendo 2001, 416). For the issue of a Catholic moralization of the French subtext, see also Mérida Jiménez 2013, 45–70. A second Castilian print version is *El baladro del sabio Merlín. Primera parte de la demanda del sancto Grial* (Sevilla 1535); first Galaico-Portuguese adaptions seem to be older (cf. Lendo 2001, 428).
257 Bogdanow (1991) presents an attempt to reconstitute the Post-Vulgate cycle from French, Spanish and Portuguese texts.
258 BNE Madrid, ms. 1196. For the connections of the Castilian text with the prose Lancelot and the cycle Post-Vulgate, see Correia 2013.
259 *Sergas de Esplandián, Palmerín de Olivia, Floriseo, Clarián de Landanís, Amadís de Grecia, Florambel de Lucea*, etc. are all full of text-bearing artefacts, illustrating the great popularity of the chivalric ambiance in the sixteenth century, a time marked by nostalgia for the lost and fantastic chivalric world.
260 Although it is a topos in research that Teresa de Ávila read during her youth the Amadís novels and other chivalric texts, see Carrión 1994, 36.
261 See Sharrer 1984.
262 *La Suite du Roman de Merlin* (1996, 330). See also Morros 1988, 468–469.
263 See *Grimalte y Gradissa* (1971, 54). For this comparison, see the Sharrer 1988; Morros 1988, 469; Lendo 2001.
264 On the "chivalric" debt in Juan de Flores's novel, see Waley's introduction in *Grimalte y Gradissa* (1971, xxiii–xxvii).
265 In *Grimalte y Gradissa*, the tomb, described just after Grimalte's "Lamentation", is richly adorned with poetic inscription. On one side, on the banner attached to the tomb wall is painted a boat without oars bearing this poetic inscription on its canvas: *En esta barca de amor / y mar de vana esperança, / es un barquero, Dolor, / que en el aprieto mayor / al más peligro se lança. / Y la árbol, que es la Ventura, / con vela poco segura, / en este piélago tal, / acostándose procura / al cabo de mayor mal*. (1971, 55). This poem about the fatal uncertainties of love, on his part, is used again in an epitaph cited in the chivalric adventure *Tristán de Leonís*, printed in 1501 (cf. Waley 1971, XXV; Morros 1988). This fact might show, once again, the flexibility of re-textualizing poetical fragments in different generical and semantical contexts.
266 Cf. Haywood 1997.
267 Cf. Haywood 1997; Dreyermond 2002; Macpherson 1998.
268 Cf. Macpherson 1998.

269 Casas Rigall 2008; Folger 2016.
270 Beltrán 2005; Lang 2017, 92–103.
271 Cf. Greenblatt 1980.
272 Cf. Foucault 1994.
273 For the *invenciones* in Tirant, see Beltrán 2005, 138. See the question of *micro-relatos* in: Casas Rigall 2008, 50; Dreyermond 2002.
274 For the tendency of de-semantization in the context of a parallel emblematical scenification of "vacuous" communication and the power structure in this text, see also my interpretation in Béreiziat-Lang 2018a.
275 The theatral aspect of *Tirant lo blanc* has been developed in Beltrán 1999.
276 In Pedro Núñez's continuation of the sentimental romance *Cárcel de Amor* (1492), the situation is very similar. The silent dialogue established between the text-bearing clothes of the beloved Laureola and Leriano might be the paroxysm of an artificialization of the sentimental dialogue, see Folger 2016, 227–231.
277 For more information on etymology and etymological discussions see Pierce 2006.
278 For the ancient tradition see Kruschwitz 2010. For the early modern renewal of the ancient tradition see Doblhofer 1996.
279 Except for one example from Saxo Grammaticus and some Latin words in a *Carmina Burana* poem, this article won't cover medieval Latin literature. In his book on the *inscriptio arguta*, a certain type of baroque genre, Thomas Neukirchen hints to one wooden inscription by the Frankish poet Moduin, see Neukirchen 1999, 190.
280 For some reflections on the non-courtly sphere in German literature see Wenzel 1986.
281 See Clausen 1994, 288 ff.
282 See Breed 2006, 130.
283 Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* 1970, 183. I am transcribing "v" instead of "u" with regard to modern spelling. For modern prose see Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* 1994, 278f.
284 *Carmina Burana*, 1191. See the *Minnerede B 255*, *Conversation between a Knight and a Lady*: The lady faints, he writes *amor vincit omnia* on a rose leaf, and puts the leaf into her mouth. Immediately the lady gets back to health (Klingner/Lieb 2013, 387).
285 See Tsouparopoulou/Meier 2015, 49. The term *ecofact* was coined by Binford 1964, 432f.
286 For a reflection on skin as skin and parchment see Holsinger 2010.
287 Doblhofer 1996, 187 (my translation).
288 See Campe 1991. And see several publications by Martin Stingelin, for example the collection: Stingelin/Giurato/Zanetti (eds.) 2005.
289 *Dumque uetustatis saltim uestigia querit / Sedulus, obicitur fluuiali consita riuo / Populus Oenones, ubi mechi falce notate / Scripta latent Paridis tenerique leguntur amores* (I, ch. V, 457–460).
290 Küsters 1996, 71 (my translation). Küsters describes new developments concerning the authentication of charters (via crosses, monograms, specified colours). These developments may be reflected in the various examples of shibboleths in accounts of Tristan and Iseult.
291 Concerning the combination of "T" and "I" see Klingenberg 1974, 145.
292 Marie de France's lai has been translated into Old Norse. See Geitarlauf, in: *Strengleikar*, 196–199.
293 See, in particular, Sayers 2004.
294 Sayers 2004, 3.
295 Latour 1994, 40.
296 Cf. Latour 1994, 110.

297 Cohen 2015, 109.
298 Cf. Balke et al. 2015, 256.
299 In this case, the author's description of the inscription is the relevant piece of information to make this point, even though the following inscription is part of the corpus of Old French inscriptions, it is not as crucial in this specific context.
300 Unless a translated edition is given in the bibliography, the translations are my own.

301 Cf. Gertz 2016, 188–192; Schaper 2016.
302 Cf. Ogorek 2004, 297–306.
303 Fox/Panagiotopoulos/Tsouparopoulou 2015, 63–70.
304 Cf. Balke et al. 2015, 249.
305 The following categorisation is based on Marchello-Nizia 2006, 103–120.
306 Finegan 2008, 195.
307 Cf. Laura Velte's and Michael R. Ott's chapter on inscriptions in German literature and the Cabinet of Curiosities chapter by Ricarda Wagner, Michael R. Ott, Christine Neufeld, Maria Krümpelmann, Tamara Ludwig and Ludger Lieb in this volume.
308 Cohen 2015, 33.
309 Cohen 2015, 52.
310 Cf. Klein 2001, 582.
311 Ramey 2013, 335.
312 Ramey 2013, 336.
313 Ramey 2013, 339.
314 Cf. Ricarda Wagner's and Christine Neufeld's article on inscriptions in British literature in this volume.
315 Ehlich 2007, 16.
316 Lieb/Wagner 2017, 24.
317 *Fragment of a poem containing Thomas à Becket's prophecies* (1870), cf. Coote 2000, 130f.
318 Finegan 2008, 195.
319 See Zink 2016, especially 46–56.
320 See Renaut 2004.
321 See Jones 1987, 139.
322 Renaut mentions several sources, for example: Herodotus, *Histories*, V, 6; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 14.19–20, see Renaut 2004, 88.
323 "Certains guerriers germains (Tacite, *Germanie*, 43, 6) et bretons (César, *Guerre des Gaules*, 5, 14) se badigeonnaient le corps de noir ou de bleu avant de partir au combat. Ces peintures corporelles ont été confondues dès l'Antiquité avec des tatouages indélébiles" (Renaut 2004, 89).
324 See Gustafson 2000; Jones 1987, 2000.
325 See Lev. 19:28.
326 Caplan 2000, xv.
327 Burrus 2003, 405.
328 Fleming 2001, 107, with Early Modern evidence that might indicate a long tradition.
329 In the ninth stanza Sigrdrifa gives some advice on runes for childbirth that are supposed to be scratched into the palms of the hands. In another Old Norse poem from the second half of the thirteenth century, *Sólarljóð* ("The Song of the Sun"), often compared to Dante's *Divina Commedia*, sinners are portrayed with bloody runes on their chests (*Sólarljóð* 2007, 287–357, stanza 61).
330 See von See et al. 2006, 559.
331 See Healy 2016, 1237.
332 Quoted in: Kieckhefer 1989, 74. We would like to thank Sylvia Huot for drawing our attention to this passage.
333 For textual ingestion and eucharistic references in general see also Rubin 1991.
334 Certeau 1990, 206: "[S]ans cesse, la loi s'écrit sur les corps. […] Elle en fait son livre. Ces écritures effectuent deux opérations complémentaires: par elles, les êtres vivants sont 'mis en texte', mués en signifiants des règles (c'est une intextuation) et, d'autre part, la raison ou le Logos d'une société 'se fait chair' (c'est une incarnation)".

335 “Hurt not the earth nor the sea nor the trees, till we sign the servants of our God in their foreheads” (Revelation 7:3).
336 See Küsters 1999.
337 See Kiening 2016, 227.
338 See Küsters 1999, 82 ff.; Kiening 2016, 226–227, the following text passage (Caesarius von Heisterbach 2009, 109) is cited in Kiening 2016, 388.
339 Translation by Newman 2003, 182.
340 Rubin 1991, 307.
341 Kay 2017, 3.
342 Brit. Mus. ms. Cott. Calig. A II., c. 1450.
343 The martyrdom of St Cassian of Imola, stabbed to death by his pupils with their iron styli, is another example of this trope.
344 Kehnel 2015, 257.
345 See Barros Dias 2005, Lang 2017, 84.
346 See Walker Bynum 1991.
347 See Nyffenegger 2013, 272. For medieval female authorship, see Summit 2003.
348 See *The Katherine Group* 2016, http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/liflade-ant-passiun-of-seinte-margarete (last accessed: 07. 02. 2018). Nyffenegger 2013, 274.
349 Burrus 2003, 409.
350 Cortés Timoner 2004.

351 Healy 2016, 1239.
352 For the Old Testament tradition see Carr 2005; Küsters 1999.
353 Jager 2000, xiv.
354 Jacobus de Voragine 2012, 143.
355 For an Iberian version of this story, see the paragraph from *Sermones de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro de León*, cited in Stephanie Béreiziat-Lang's chapter on Iberian inscriptions in this volume: *E quando muere el bueno de Inaçio, abriéronle el coraçón en muchas partes e en cada parte le fallan el nonbre de Ihesús escripto de letras de oro*. (*Sermones en Romance* 2002, 236). It is interesting that in this version the heart-inscription gets multiplied and is omnipresent *en cada parte*.
356 In the hagiography of Clara de Montefalco, after the death of the nun, people discover the image of the crucifixion engraved in her heart. Although a pictorial incision is substituted for scripture, the principle remains the same. The medieval theory of intromission, where vision involves emissions from an object entering the eye, offers another form of textual incorporation: repeated contemplation and meditation of the Passion is considered capable of leaving physical marks in the viewer.
357 Foucault 2004.
358 See Küsters 1999, 105–108, Landfester 2012, 131–148.
359 Seuse 1907, 15.
360 As Küsters notes, the IHS monogram had a documentary character in medieval legal practice. Seuse's body figures as a "charismatic accreditation" half-way between corporeal inscription and manuscript (Küsters 1999, 106, 108).
361 Hahn 1993, 209.
362 *Richard Coer de Lyon* 2015, 3425–3589. For more on this romance, see Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's chapter on British literature in this volume.
363 See Kiening 2006.
364 Kiening 2006, 111–162 concerning "cannibalistic logics" in colonial accounts.
365 Cf. the exemplary studies in Coatsworth/Owen-Crocker 2018 and the survey in Heller 2017. Naturally, textiles are also required to protect from environmental factors (cold, wind, the sun, rain etc.). As this aspect does not play a prominent role for script-bearing textiles, it will be disregarded in this chapter.
366 Cf. Michael R. Ott's chapter on weapons in this volume.
367 The use of textiles as a primary writing material is relatively rare; in ancient China there apparently existed a practice of writing on silken manuscripts, cf. Enderwitz/Giele et al. 2015, 422–425.
368 Cf. Coatsworth 2007 for details.
369 Enderwitz et al. 2015.
370 Rogers/Wild 2003, 1.
371 Enderwitz/Folger/Sauer 2015, 568.
372 Coatsworth 2007.
373 On the robe the personifications of the four arts of the quadrivium (geometry, arithmetic, music, astronomy) are embroidered, cf. Burgess 1984, 100–103; Wandhoff 2003, 134–156.
374 Cf. Wandhoff 2003, 157–179.
375 Examples of inscriptions on other fabrics are rare: In Herbort von Fritzlar's *Trojanerkrieg* (10668–10674) the narrator describes the silk shroud for Hector, in which Plato's writings on dialectics are woven and sewn on; in the *Neujahrsgruß auf 1446* the motto is written on a flag waving on a mill: *Hütt wol vnd halt vest!*
376 Cf. Burns 2004.
377 See also Laura Velte's and Michael R. Ott's chapter on inscriptions in German Literature in this volume.
378 In *Erec et Enide* (Hartmann's main source), Chrétien does not write about a tent,

but about a silver bed with golden curtains, which however do not bear any inscriptions.

379 For more on fraudulent inscriptions on gravestones, see Iris Roebling-Grau's and Sascha A. Schultz' chapter on inscriptions in French literature in this volume.

380 An example of a tent painted and inscribed from the inside: Der Stricker 1995, 2423–2427.

381 Matthaei 1967, 1–34; cf. Klingner/Lieb 2013, vol. 1, no. B459.

382 The first-person narrator also finds sayings about love in Peter Suchenwirt's Minnerede *Di schön abentewr*. They are written on the borders of a tent of Lady Honour and Lady Love, whose blue imitates the morning and evening skies to the east and west: the outside of the tent is the "heaven" of love vaulted over the world here; cf. Klingner/Lieb 2013, vol. 1, no. B449; Ernst 2006, 63.

383 Cf. Kraß 2006.

384 It is characteristic of the other, namely the courtly scholarly culture of the early fourteenth century, that Heinrich von Neustadt in Gottes Zukunft, his German adaptation of *Anticlaudianus*, only ascribes the function of identification to textile inscriptions.: *Uf iegliches waz geschriben* | *Wie der frauwen name was* ("On each dress was written what the lady's name was", 266f.).

385 E. g. John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* (mid-fifteenth century): Amoryus finds a bloody headscarf, which he is able to identify as the headscarf of his beloved Cleopes, because the letter "C" is embroidered onto it.

386 The close connection between love and textile inscription is already proven for Al-Andalus in the eleventh century, compare the inscription embroided on the two hems on the dress of Wallada bint al-Mustakfi, which states—according to Ibn Bassām's historical portrait of Wallāda—on the right hand side: "I am, by God, fit for high positions, | And am going my way, with pride!" and on the left hand side: "Forsooth, I allow my lover to touch my cheek, | And bestow my kiss on him who craves it!" (Nykl 1946, 107; cf. López-Baralt 1992, 17f.).

387 *Der Traum von der Liebe* (B210), ed. Sprague 2007, 1–12; cf. Klingner/Lieb 2013, vol. 1, no. B210.

388 For a related example, see the discussion of *The Assembly of Ladies* in Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's chapter on inscriptions in British literature in this volume.

389 Already around 1400 the European nobility commonly wore inscribed identification markers (devices), which were freely chosen, on the knight's armour. The device consisted of a picture, a motto (often also acronyms) and symbolic colours. Devices were not only worn on clothing, but also on armour and weapons (Folger 2016, 219).

390 Folger 2016, 218; [Béreiziat-]Lang 2017, 92–97.

391 Cf. Klingner/Lieb 2013, vol. 1, no. B368.

392 Joplin 1984 (Philomela); Waltenberger 2012 (Laüstic). For more on the subject of embroidery, women's voices and Philomela see also Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's chapter on inscriptions in British literature in this volume.

393 Ovid 2007, 6.412–674.

394 Behmenburg 2009, 188–210 (= Kap. 3.1. "Die Poetik der Zeichen. Das Gewebe Philomelas" [Poetics of Signs. The Texture of Philomela]); Lieb/Ott 2015, 19–22.

395 Koble/Séguy 2011, 456–469. On the relation of *Laüstic* and Philomela cf. Quéruel 2006, 84–88; Behmenburg 2009, 46–70; Waltenberger 2012.

396 Garcilaso de la Vega 2009, 180–205.

397 Freccero 1984, 776.

398 For a summary of how fourteenth-century commentaries on Dante grappled with the gate's inscription see Pinti 2000, 311–340.

399 Freccero 1984, 775.

400 See Freccero 1984, as well as Frongia 1998. All citations from the Bible in this article will be drawn from the Douay Rheims Bible, http://www.drbo.org/index.htm (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019).

401 For a list of the different architectural structures referenced in Dante commentary see Frongia 1998. On the affinity between Dante's gate and Romenesque portal inscriptions see Kendall 1993.
402 See OED definition, "architecture, n." in: *OED Online*, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/10408?rskey=su4fkG&result=1&isAdvanced=false (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019). Since the prominence of funereal edifaces, such as sepulchres and tombs, in medieval narrative merits its own scholarly study in Laura Velte's chapter on tombs, I will omit them from my consideration here. Similarly, portable items such as tents, and items that could be considered "furnishings" will not feature in this argument, in order explore the dynamism of locostatic inscriptions. For a discussion of the tent as a unique inscribed artefact cf. Laura Velte's and Michael R. Ott's chapter on German literature and Ludger Lieb's chapter on textiles in this volume.
403 See Safran 2011.
404 Safran 2011, 135.
405 Hollander 1969. Available through *Dante Lab Reader*.
406 Mazzoni 1941.
407 Debiais 2017, 302.
408 Freccero 1984, 776f.
409 Kendall 1993, 113.
410 On the "two stelae" traditions see Adler 1989; Klijn 1977, 24f., 121–123; Stone 1996, 151, 198; Orlov 2001, 137–158.
411 Orlov 2001, "Overshadowed", n. p. (website).
412 Cf. Stephanie Béreiziat-Lang's discussion of this text in the Iberian literature chapter of this volume. I cite her translation of the *Estoria* passage.
413 See Dias 2004.
414 Porto 2017.
415 Unless otherwise noted or listed in the bibliography, translations are my own. My thanks to Michael R. Ott for his assistance here. For information on inscriptions in the early Greco-Roman versions see Sironen 2003.
416 It is interesting to note that the inscription begins speaking in the voice of the historical figure and ends up speaking in the voice of the statue.
417 See Sironen 2003, 289f. We also see the inscription as authentication device in Alexander romances that deal with his mysterious paternity, as with Nectanabus's inscribed honourary column in the *Alexanderchronik des Meister Babiloth* (early fifteenth century).
418 On Apollonius as *pater patriae* see Ziegler 1984, 222.
419 *The Romance of Alexander the Great by Pseudo-Callisthenes*, 51. The relationship between inscription and foundation is also evident in the legend associating Charlemagne with a monastic alphabet, which appears in his official *vita* composed in Germany sometime after 1165 (his canonisation). The legend claims that Charlemagne founded 23 monasteries, each with a letter of the alphabet inscribed on the lintel to indicate the order in which they had been founded. See Remensnyder 1996.
420 Thanks to Michael R. Ott for the translation into English. The shift from third to first person in lines 1645–1650 may be the result of a different source being employed. It also works as a kind of free indirect speech.
421 Remensnyder 1996, 884.
422 Riccioni 2011. Coates-Stephens proposes that the great interest in epigraphy displayed by the Franks and Anglo Saxons, on the other hand, was a desire to revive ancient epigraphy transmitted by late antique codices primarily. See Coates-Stephens 2002, 282.
423 Petrucci 1993.
424 Riccioni 2011, 445.

425 Riccioni 2011, 444.
426 For (art) historical analysis of inscription in medieval architecture in the West see (in addition to Petrucci's *Public Lettering*) Kendall 1998. For comparative purposes, see Papalexandrou 2001; Bierman 1998.
427 Debiais 2017, 288.
428 Riccioni 2011, 453.
429 A scene such as Lancelot viewing a fresco depicting Aeneas's adventures in the thirteenth-century *Prosa-Lancelot* has some historical affinity, perhaps, with actual frescos such as the the Schalkaldener *Iwein*. Though the majority of medieval frescos portraying literary texts that remain (such as Arthur Pisanello's Arthurian frescos for Lodovico Gonzaga in Mantua, Luca Signorelli's *Purgatorio* frescos in the Capella di San Brizia, Orvieto Cathedral, the Parzival frescos in the Haus zur Kunkel in Constance) tend to be from the later Middle Ages.
430 Safran 2011, 119.
431 See Stephanie Béreiziat-Lang's discussion of this text in the Iberian literature chapter of this volume. As Béreiziat-Lang notes, *Kalila wa-Dimna* is itself a translation of an earlier Sanskrit text, *The Panchatantra*. However, while early scholars claim that the "Tale of the King's Son" is of Indian and Buddhist origin, there is no clear analogue for it in the Sanskrit manuscripts. See Keith-Falconer 1885, "Introduction", 34.
432 Most fascinating are those examples, like the Grail temple in Albrecht's *Der Jungere Titurel* (c. 1260–1275), that straddle various traditions. This temple is built on a divinely-sanctioned model, featuring didactic sculptural/inscriptional programs of religious figures on its interior, and a secular program delineating courtly conduct for knights and ladies on its exterior. Embedded precious stones, whose own allegorical meanings must also be read in order to enter the temple, seem to pose an interpretive impediment. For an analysis of the extraordinary ekphrastic architectural description of the Grail temple, see Brokmann 1999. See also Volfing, 2007.
433 Carruthers 2008, 118 ff. For more on the topic of narrated inscription and the memory palace, see the discussion of Chaucer's *House of Fame* in Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's chapter on British literature and, in particular, the overview of relevant scholarship in note 48.
434 The citations will be identified by stanza number in the text.
435 The *Roman de la Rose* contains several relatively unremarkable inscriptions. The "high crenelated [garden] wall, sculptured outside and laid out with many fine inscriptions" features personified vices with inscribed *tituli* (129 ff.); a marble fountain features "small letters" cut into the stone indicating that Narcissus died there (1429–1438).
436 In addition to Daniel Pinti 2000 (cited above) see also Minnis/Scattergood/Smith 1995, 215; Aers 1981; Sklute, 1981; Reed 1990; Kelley 1979.
437 On medieval spatial practices see Cassidy-Welch 2010.
438 For more on medieval treatments of the writing on the wall in Daniel, see Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's chapter on inscriptions in British literature in this volume.
439 This topic is also addressed in Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's British Literature chapter with reference to the architectonic features of his other dream visions.
440 It is worth noting that the parable of the widow's mite in Mark is immediately followed by Jesus foretelling the destruction of the temple: "And as he was going out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him: Master, behold what manner of stones and what buildings are here. And Jesus answering, said to him: Seest thou all these great buildings? There shall not be left a stone upon a stone, that shall not be

thrown down" (Mark 13:1f.).

441 Medieval graffiti existed historically but is not featured in narrative contexts. I am working here with a more general definition of graffiti, rather than a specific analysis of medieval forms of graffiti. See Mieszkowski 2010.

442 We see William Langland express similar concerns in *Piers Plowman*. Cf. Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's chapter on inscriptions in British literature.

443 Cf. Bourgne 2011, 127–132 for a number of interesting examples that trace the medieval opposition between the wax tablet, mainly used for preparatory writing, and the ink and parchment employed for clean copies.

444 Cruse 2007, for instance, analyses an impressive fourteenth-century ivory tablet kept at The Cloisters and proposes to understand it as a medieval Valentine's card. Brown 1994 lists more luxury examples of tablets (10) and discusses general uses of tablets in the Middle Ages (4–9), including Charlemagne's (8). For the vocabulary that medieval sources employ with regard to tablets and their inscription, see Rouse/Rouse 2013, 14.

445 Cf. Robson 2007, 67–71 on Mesopotamian uses, forms and production of tablets.

446 Carr 2005, 20–40 discusses the Mesopotamian connection between tablets and memory. He notes that the trope of the tablet of the mind was also prevalent in Ancient Greece (98) and central to the Torah (127). Cf. also Jager 1996, 4f.

447 For more on inscribed hearts, see Stephanie Béreiziat-Lang's and Michael R. Ott's chapter on body and skin in this volume, especially pp. 201–203.

448 All translations from the medieval vernaculars into English are my own.

449 Cf. Cormier 2006, 68–70, who has identified nine steps on Lavinia's path to emotional knowledge that he relates to sections of her monologues and other self-expressions.

450 Bennett 2010, 23. The concept of assemblages and its relevance for text-bearing artefacts is also discussed in the introduction to this volume, p. 4f.

451 Drawing on Vilém Flusser's thoughts on inscriptionality, Wuth 1997, 75f. reads Lavinia's incision as an example of an ordering spirit transforming chaos into cosmos. He correlates this scene in the romance of Eneas with larger developments consolidating the practice of writing around the year 1200. Focussing on the letter that Lavinia later sends to Eneas to communicate her feelings in the French *Roman*, Nolan 1992, 79, 92–95 and Adams 2005, 124–129 also maintain that Lavinia gains self-knowledge and mastery of the discourse of love through writing. I argue that Lavinia's initiation into the textual discourse of love starts earlier, with her inscription in wax.

452 Cf. Quast/Schausten 2008 for a comparison between the French and the German version with regard to discourses of love. In Heinrich's version, they argue, love takes on a physical quality and can be transmitted by touch, which agrees well with Lavinia's need to materialise the name of her beloved.

453 The German tale of Gregorius by Hartmann von Aue (twelfth century), also features a tablet bearing a story of incestuous sin written by a woman. Cf. Laura Velte's and Michael R. Ott's chapter on inscriptions in medieval German literature in this volume.

454 In the German prose adaptation of the *Metamorphoses* written by Georg Wickram in the sixteenth century, for example, Byblis's brother is so enraged after reading her letter that he *warff die taffel, das sie brach* ("threw the tablets so that they broke", 12.1031).

455 Cf. Archibald 2001, 68 ff.

456 Cf. Archibald 2001, 86. Mills 2015, 146–148 explores more Christian reinterpretations of incestuous and otherwise deviant sexualities in the *Ovide moralisé*, such as Myrrha's desire for her father and Orpheus's passion for men.

457 Gertz 2016 examines textual history and significance of the tablets of the law in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. He also notes the similarities with Akkadian legal practices (190).

458 Murdoch 2009, 1–41 and 263–266 offers an overview of the Latin apocryphal sources and corresponding vernacular versions in medieval European literature.

459 Dean 2010 explores the curiously domestic materiality in the Adam and Eve legends.

460 Cf. Novacich 2017, 25–44.

461 Murdoch 2009, 216f. discusses the term "Achiliacos" in detail, reading it as a garbled version of the Greek *a-cheilos*, "without lips".

462 Petroski 1992 narrates the story of how post-its were invented when an engineer sought to create sticky bookmarks by using an adhesive previously developed for the painting of cars.

463 Cf. p. 88 of this volume.

464 Chaganti 2014, 54.

465 According to the CRC database, most plaques serve as epitaphs attached to coffins or statues positioned on the grave. Cf. Laura Velte's chapter on tombs in this volume.

466 Interestingly, the *INRI* tablet is not generally counted among the *arma Christi*. Even very comprehensive collections of all things to do with Jesus, such as the 38 objects illustrated in the fourteenth-century *Omne Bonum* encyclopaedia (London, British Library MS Royal 6.E.VI., fol. 15r), list all torture instruments as well as objects that did not touch the body of Christ but were related to the scene of the crucifixion, like the dice the soldiers used to gamble for Christ's clothing. The tablet, however, is not among them. Olk 2012, 218f. discusses other vestiges of Christ's life still visible in Mandeville's Jerusalem.

467 Newstock has even described deixis as "the principal declaration of an epitaph", see Newstok 2009, 1.

468 Basic information on the development of tombs in the Middle Ages has been provided by Panofsky 1964; Bauch 1976; Ariès 2009; Kloos 1980, 70–79; Petrucci 1995; Körner 1997.
469 The burial in the church proper was generally limited to dignitaries (bishops, auxiliary bishops, provosts, deans, abbots and priors) (see Kloos 1980, 71). For sovereigns and high nobility a funeral in the church was regulated by the patronage law, to which the *ius sepulturae* belonged; the ministerial nobility and the patrician bourgeoisie, on the other hand, could only obtain a funeral by the foundation of a chapel or an altar with the pertinent benefices (see ibid., 72).
470 See Ariès 2009, 278.
471 Ariès 2009, 280. Epitaphs on tombs are distinguished from memorials (likewise called epitaphs) emerging since the fourteenth century onwards, that were added to the tomb slab, which was executed as a tomb, but later also served only as a memorial for the deceased.
472 See Isid. *Etym.* 1.41: *Apud veteres enim nemo conscribebat historiam nisi is qui interfuisset, et ea quae conscribenda essent vidisset. Melius enim oculis quae fiunt deprehendimus, quam quae auditione colligimus*.
473 Cited after Chibnall (ed.) 1980 (in the following cited as *Hist. Eccl.*).
474 For a comprehensive discussion of all sources, please see my PhD Thesis (*Sepulkralsemiotik*, expected to be published in 2020).
475 Mortuary rolls came up in the ninth century. They circulated between Benedictine monasteries containing notices (*encyclica*) of the deaths of clergy and were successively extended. Personal sympathy could be expressed in the form of *tituli*. Some of the rolls reached astonishing proportions. The roll of abbess Mathilda of the Benedictine abbey of St Trinité of Caen (died 1113), for example, is 20 metres long, see Signori 2014, 7. An edition of mortuary rolls has been provided by Dufour (ed.) 2005–2013.
476 Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* cites a total of five epitaphs. Two of these are for Pope Gregory the Great and Augustine of Canterbury, both of whom are assumed to have spread Roman Catholic Christianity in southern England. A further epitaph for Caedwalla, King of Wessex is mentioned, as is one for Bishop Theodor, of whose grave inscription (numbering 34 verses) only the first and the last four verses are mentioned. Finally, the epitaph of Bishop Wilfrid is mentioned, on whose death (similar to Gregory the Great) an extensive biographical review is provided, which is condensed in an epitaph featuring twenty verses.
477 On the poetic insertions in different historical works and the relationships between Dudo of St Quentin, William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni see Pohl 2015, 225–240.
478 On the epitaphs in Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* see Kay 2013, 36–44. Kay assumes that the poems were created earlier and only later were added to the historical work.
479 The dates of Orderic's life are taken from the autobiographical entries in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.
480 See *Hist. Eccl.*, VII, 44 and Comment 3.
481 The period of origin of the MSS. Lat. 5506 vol. 1 (books I and II) and vol. 2 (books III–VI), as well as 10913, are dated to the time between 1123 and 1141.
482 See Debiais/Ingrand-Varenne 2016, 139.
483 The following information refers to the named autographs and thus to the epitaphs in the books IV–VI and X–XIII.
484 This space-saving design is predominant in MS lat. 10913 (book X–XIII): Only two epitaphs are visually highlighted with a ragged margin. In both instances, clerics from the monastery of St Évroul are mentioned. Both were given grave inscriptions by Orderic himself. Also, the marginalia are in parts left out (not,

however, in any of the poems composed by Orderic).
485 Debiais/Ingrand-Varenne 2016, 141.
486 More examples of tomb ekphrasis may be found in the vernacular romances of antiquity *Le Roman d'Énéas*, *Le Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure, as well as in the many vernacular versions of the romance of Alexander. Two other important examples are given in the romantic story of *Floire et Blancheflor* and in *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach. For a comprehensive discussion of all these texts, please see my PhD Thesis.
487 See Killermann 2002, 299–331.
488 See Ratkowitsch 1991, on the ekphrasis passages in Châtillon, 129–211.
489 See Wulfram 2000, 253 ff.
490 For more on this inscription see "Inscriptions on Wood" in this volume.
491 Cited after Colker (ed.) 1978. All translations are taken from Townsend 1996.
492 For the implementation of classical first-person inscriptions, see Svenbro 1988.
493 See Cic. *Pro Arch.* 24, Hier. *Vita S. Hilar. eremitae* 1.1–4, PL 23, 29a, Hist. Aug. *Vita Probi* 1.2; at length on the motif of the heroic epitaph, see Castelain 2016, 109–130.
494 See Wulfram 2000, 235.
495 See Wulfram 2000, 252f.; Lafferty 2011, 137 and Lafferty 1994, 79.
496 See Daniel 8:3–8.
497 See also Lafferty 1994, 81: "At this point in the poem, three books from its conclusion, Alexander has already served his purpose in God's divine plan: once the Persian Empire has fallen, and its power been transferred to the Greeks, Alexander's role in world history is over".
498 While the first extant complete manuscript of the German Prosa Lancelot, ms. P (cpg 147), dates back to the third quarter of the fifteenth century, only the fragments M (cgm 5250) and A (Amorbacher Pergamentstück) go back to the thirteenth century. We can therefore only state with certainty that there was a German translation of *Lancelot Propre* in the high Middle Ages.
499 See Solterer 1984, 558.
500 Similarly, Maddox concluded that tombs would act "as a means of increasing the efficiency of its readers memory of a massive work of fiction" (Maddox 2000, 338).

501 Colliot has pointed out that epitaphs in Prosa-Lancelot are formally distinguished from real tomb inscriptions. Instead of limiting themselves to common templates, they are often individually designed. Also, they show no notion of Christian piety. See Colliot 1973, 155.
502 Valette's discussion of the relation between prophetic dreams and prophetic tombs points this out particularly. See Valette 1998, 416–424.
503 On this topic see Unzeitig-Herzog 1990.
504 Klinger has interpreted this epitaphic figure of finalisation as a means to emphasise the biographical construction of the romance, see Klinger 2001, 89.
505 Cited after Steinhoff (ed.) 1995–2004, in the following the three parts, *Lancelot Propre*, *Queste del Saint Graal* and *Mort Artu*, are cited as LuGin I/II, LuGral I/II and Suche with page and line references. Reference passages in the French Lancelot en prose as well as the attendant English translation will be added for all quotes. French citations refer to Micha 1978–1983 (given with number of volume in Roman numerals and page number) and Pauphilet 1923 (with page number and line). All English translations are taken from Lacy 2010 (with number of volume and page number).
506 Translation by Lacy 2010, 3, 153. The German text is equivalent to the text available in the French edition, see Micha XXIVa, 30–33, 331: *Et el mi lieu de le chimentiere si avoit une grant lame de metal tres merveilleusement ouvree a or et a pieres et a esmax, et si i avoit lettres qui disoient "ceste lame n'iert ja levee par main d'omme ne par esfors, se par chelui non qui conquerra cest doleros castel et de chelui est li nons escris ci desous"*.
507 Translation by Lacy 2010, 3, 153. The text of the French edition replicates the wording almost exactly. See Micha VII, XXIVa, 32, 332: *Et lors voit les lettres qui dient: "Chi gerra Lancelos del Lac, li fiex au roi Ban de Benoÿc." Et lors remet la lame jus et bien seit que ch'est ses nons qu'il a veu*.
508 Translation by Lacy 2010, 3, 165. Unlike in the German text, Yvain is not mentioned in the French text. See Micha VII, XXVIIIa.11, 354: […] *et tant qu'il vienent a une tombe ou li nons mon signor Gauvain estoit escris; si i avoit "Chi gist mesire Gauvain et vés la sa test" et autretel dient de tous les compaignons que mesires Gauvain avoit amenés avoec lui*.
509 The motif of the false grave, in which writing plays a big part, has existed since antiquity and was popular also in medieval times, as we see in romances like *Apollonius of Tyre*, *Floire et Blancheflor* and many more.
510 Suche, 76, 2f. In the French version there is no letter mentioned. See Pauphilet, 36, 12–14: *Or vos dirai donc, fet li freres, que vos feroiz: alez a cele tombe la, et la levez, et je vos di que vos troveroiz desoz aucune grant merveille* (Lacy 2010, 6, 24: "'I'll tell you what to do,' the monk continued. 'Go over to the tombstone and lift it. You're certain to find a wondrous surprise underneath'.").
511 See Waltenberger 1990, 154; Wandhoff 2003, 322; Klinger 2011, 442; Witthöft 2014, 248.
512 See Witthöft 2014.
513 Important medieval female knights and warriors are, for example, Camilla, featured in accounts of Aeneas; Brunhild, the Icelandic queen, who plays an important role in the Nibelung mythology; Silence, the hero(ine) of *Roman de Silence*; and Guibourc, William of Orange's wife (formerly a Muslim princess) featured in the French Guillaume d'Orange cycle. See, with special attention to female warriors and their armour, Stock 1995, 56–83.
514 See Cowell 2006.
515 Wagner et al. 2009, 12.
516 Worley/Wagner 2013.
517 For runes on (real) weapons see: Grünzweig 2004.

518 For further information and a more detailed discussion of *Richard Coer de Lyon* see Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's chapter on British literature in this volume.
519 Cohen 2003, 46 et passim. See also Crane 2011, 70 et passim.
520 Cohen 2003, 53.
521 See Ohly 1995.
522 *The Nibelungenlied*, 401.
523 See Khanmohamadi 2017.
524 See Gillespie 1973, 96.
525 See Kopytoff 1986.
526 Paz 2017, 2.
527 Translation is mine; compare Laura Velte's and Michael R. Ott's article on German inscriptions in this volume.
528 Wright 1995, 45.
529 *Le Livre du Graal III*, 814f.; Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 498 [The Sankgreal]; *Prosalancelot* V, 18; *Libros de Caballerías*, 166b [La demanda del Sancto Grial].
530 Wright 1995, 46.
531 Cowell 2006, 8.
532 Cowell 2006, 8.
533 See Wärmländer et al. 2015; on rings in general, see Robinson 2008; Scarisbrick 1993; Ward 1981; Evans 1931.
534 On luxury as a complex category connecting different discourses and allowing medieval literature to mark difference, see Eming et al. 2015.
535 See Smith 1908, xxxvii–xlvii; Rieger 2016.
536 See Okasha 1971, 137; British Museum, AF.1404.
537 *ring ic hatt*, see Finger-ring (British Museum 1995,0902.1); see Page 1999, 169.
538 See Hilgert 2010, 97f., 108–114; compare to Harris/Overbey 2014, 134f., 137–143.
539 See Ott/Focken 2016; Bintley 2012; Johnston 2017, 225–234; Johnston 2008, 177–180; Felski 2011, 578–588.
540 For example, see *Wigalois* (thirteenth century), 8888–8890; 10359–1079. All references to *Wigalois* are to Wirnt von Grafenberg (2014).
541 See, for example, *Wigalois*, 8906f. and *Diu Crône* (c. 1230), 7704–7737. All references to *Diu Crône* are to Heinrich von dem Türlin (2012).
542 See Page 1999, 183–185, McKinnell/Simek/Düwel 2004, 69–84; MacLeod/Mees 2006, 85–87.
543 See Smith 1908, 108f.
544 See Horn 1987, 1357f.; Engle 1981, 1003–1007.
545 See also the similar definitions in Smith 1908, xxxiii; Evans 1976, 13.
546 See Brepohl 1999; Speer 2014, xi–xiv, xxii–xxv.
547 On gems and inscribed jewellery entangling magic, religion and medicine, see Evans 1976, 9–24, 29–32, 48–54, 95–114; MacLead/Mees 2006, 188, 190. On religious and magical inscriptions, see Smith 1908, 132, 150–152; Krabath 2016, 254f.; Evans 1976, 122–132. For an individual example, see Finger-ring (British Museum OA.10262).
548 See Evans 1976, 132.
549 For example, the approximately 20 inscribed rings surviving from Anglo-Saxon times seem to have served a variety of purposes. See Okasha 2003, 29–31, 38, 40f.
550 See Smith 1908, 33–36.

551 See Herman 2017, 49, 55f., 59f.
552 See especially Page 1999, 12–14, 106–114. See also McKinnel/Simek/Düwel 2004, 31f.; Page 1964, 74f.
553 See Webster 1991, 95f.
554 See Evans 1976, 14; on runic Latin and Hebrew charms see MacLeod/Mees 2006, 16–18; McKinnell/Simek/Düwel 2004, 147–154; on Christian inscriptions and prayers in runes, see MacLeod/Mees 2006, 184–187, 202f, 208–210; McKinnell/Simek/Düwel 2004, 172f., 181–186; on the relationship between runic and Roman letters in general, see Page 1999, 212–225.
555 See Evans 1976, 140, 13–94, 170, 184, 72f, 156. On medieval lapidaries, see Cohen 2015, esp. 211–222; Murphy 2006, 42–68.
556 See Robertson 2010, 102–107; Bynum 2011, 24, 34, 37f., 58–70, 105, 231.
557 See, for example, Gaimster 2011, 874–876.
558 This might explain why texts often do not quote inscriptions. See Lieb 2015, 11–12.
559 See Fährmann 1996, 491; Smith 1908, xxxix, 35, 105–107.
560 See, for example, B224 "Von dem mayen krantz", in: *Liederbuch der Clara Hätzlerin* 1840, 234–238 (260–287).
561 See, for example, "Von dem mayen krantz", 146–149, 338–343; and "Vonn einem stroyn krenntzleyn", in: *Liederbuch der Clara Hätzlerin* 1840, 187–191 (89–124).
562 See López 1994, 53–56; Eger 2004, 450–456, Plate 1 and 29, Smith 1908, 53–55.
563 See Latour 2005, 70–82.
564 See Oesterley 1872, 273–275.
565 See, for example, Revelations 13:1, 19:12.
566 Compare to Exodus 28 and 39.
567 On Office rings, see Smith 1908, 147–149, on the Collar of Esses, see Smith 1908, 116f.
568 Rings were also worn as amulets. See Page 1999, 112f.
569 See Smith 1908, 18, 31f., 153f.
570 See Smith 1908, 53. Engraved gemstones remained popular, and apparently Roman gemstone seals were sought after and re-used exclusively as jewellery, see Platz-Horster 2011, 225–227.
571 See Okasha 2003, 37–41. See also Okasha 1995. For a practical example of the challenges posed by a ring's inscription of two names, see Okasha 1973, 169–170.
572 See Okasha 2003, 40f.
573 See Owen 2011, 96.
574 For examples of rings inscribed with names and ranks, see the Æthelswith Ring (British Museum AF.458) and Æthelwulf Ring (British Museum 1829,1114.1). For an inscription referring to the item's history, see, for example, the Sigerie Ring, inscribed *SIGERUE HEÐ MEA GEVVIRCAN* ("Sigerie ordered me to be made"), Okasha 1971, 136f., or the seventh-century Hardford Farm Brooch's runic inscription, *luda giboetæsigilæ* ("Luda mended the brooch") see Page 1999, 166. An alternative reading, "may Luda make amends by means of the brooch", would instead focus on the gift's occasion. See Bammesberger 2003. On the Manchester Ring, inscribed + *ÆDRED MEC AH EANRED MEC AGROF* (Finger-ring, British Museum SLRings.64), see Page 1999, 161f., 12f.; Okasha 1995.
575 For example, see *Beowulf*, 64–81; *Roman d'Eneas*, 3127–3142, 3216–3254; Heinrich von Veldeke 1997, 113.15–116.4–7. On gift exchange theory, see Mauss 2002; Levi-Strauss 1969; For an application to gift exchange in medieval literature (specifically *Beowulf*), see Johnston 2008, 69–90.
576 See *The Seafarer*, 83; *Beowulf*, 20–24, 1102, 1602, 2490–2493; *The Wanderer*,

34–36; *Juliana*, 22, *Maxims II*, 14f., 28f.
577 See, for example, *The Fight at Finnsburgh*, 13 and *Beowulf*, 1025–1057, 2142–2199.
578 See Heinrich von Veldeke 1997, 170.30–172.2; *Beowulf*, 1215–1231. See also Johnston 2008, 66–77. The active role of female participants in gift-exchange has long been neglected. See Gaimster 2011, 876–881.
579 *Beowulf*, 1192–1213, 2032–2056; compare Heinrich von Veldeke 1997, 207.9–36, 331.5–38, and *Roman d'Eneas*, 5763–5774, 9793–9814, to Vergil's *Aeneis*, X.495–505, XII.938–949.
580 See, for example, Okasha 2003, 37, 40–41; Hinton 1975, 177f.
581 See Johnston 2009, 144–147; Johnston 2016a, 213–214.
582 This observation on inscriptions might suggest that especially in non-typographical societies writing might be generally considered a material phenomenon comprehensible because of situational ties, in contrast to more modern, immaterial concepts of writing as transmitting information transparently from one situation to another. See Bode 1994, 148–149, on this observation concerning Shelley's "Ozymandias". See also Fleming 2001, 19–27.
583 See, for instance, Egidi 2012.
584 The British Museum holds magnificent specimens, such as a fourteenth-century gold ring engraved with *Pensez de moy* (1854,1130.48), or the Finger-ring with a grammatical love riddle (British Museum AF.1077). See also Scarisbrick 1993, 19.
585 See Smith 1908, 152–153; Graf 2011, 688f.
586 See Smith 1908, 37f.
587 See Jüdischer Hochzeitsring, Alte Synagoge Erfurt 5067/98; Bague de mariage du trésor de Colmar, Musée de Cluny Cl. 20658; See also Scholz 2013, 189f; Krabath 2016, 248f.
588 See Smith 1908, 261–262. In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Nerissa's ring is inscribed "Love me and leave me not" (5.I.147–253). Shakespeare's Hamlet calls the acting troop's prologue short as "the posy of a ring" (3.II.133).
589 See *Diu Crône*, 23242–23434; *Maxims I (B)*, 11f.; Boccaccio 1992, III.8, 9, IV.6, X.8; Wittenwiler 2012, 5277–5287.
590 See Trînca 2010, 199–202.
591 See also Ariosto 2016, XLIV,65–66; Gower 1901, I.550–556.
592 See Patterson 1991, 138–155; Johnston 2010, 254–259.
593 For example, see Johann von Würzburg 1970, 2898–3036.
594 *Tristan-Stoff in Skandinavien* 2008, 104–106, see also 110–112; see also Thomas d'Angleterre 1985, "Turin Fragment I", 941–990, "Cambridge Fragment" 49–52; Gottfried von Straßburg 2016, 18311– 18367, Beroul 1998, 2707–2730, 2792–2802.
595 See, for example, Ariosto 2016, XIX,37–40, XXIII,100–121; Thomas d'Angleterre 1985, "Sneyd Fragment", 443–462; *Tristan-Stoff in Skandinavien* 2008, 94f.
596 See, for example, *Deux Poémes de la Folie de Tristan*, 943–975 (Oxford MS); *Kudrun*, 1247–1250; Boccaccio 1992, X.9, III.7. On recognition in medieval literature, see Schulz 2008, 8–24, 37, 331–354, 498–505.
597 Cf. Gower 1901, IV.645–671, and Oesterley 1872, 287f., for engraved rings erasing lovers' memories.
598 Cf. Starobinski 2007. See, for example, Wolfram von Eschenbach 2012, 127.25–128.2, 130.26–137.30, 269.18–270.11; *Nibelungenlied*, 676–677, 844–851.
599 The popular motif of the ignorant messenger often involves jewellery as gifts (Boccaccio 1992, III.3), which sometimes also bear inscriptions. See, for example, the inscribed ring in *Der Mönch als Liebesbote B*, 203–208, 316–335, and compare to *Der Mönch als Liebesbote A*, 81–197, which treats the plot differently and only mentions an exchange of uninscribed rings. See also Grubmüller's commentary in the same edition, 1197–1201, and Rosenfeld's commentary on *Der Schüler von Paris*,

499–522.
600 Compare also to redaction A of *Der Schüler von Paris*, printed on the same pages, that omits the inscription.

601 See Ehlich 1994, 30.
602 See the thirteenth-century romance *Lohengrin*, 5311–5350.
603 See Evans 1976, 133–136.
604 For an overview, see, for example, Evans 1976, 121–139. For the individual examples, see Finger-ring, (Ashmolean Museum AN1970.1067), described in Okasha 2003, 35; for analysis of the Paußnitz ring, see Muhl 2003; also mentioned in Krabath 2016, 254; 'Eawen' ring (British Museum AF.459), discussed in Okasha 2003, 30f., 35f.
605 See Trînca 2016, 356–359, 353f.
606 See *Pearl*, 217–240, 277–360, 729–780; *Die Hochzeit*, 19,5f., 28,8–10, 23,2–4, 47–52; Rudolph von Ems 1965, 1466–1584, 3125–3176, compare also to Matthew 13:44–46; for an overview on luxury in the *Barlaam and Josaphat* material, see Traulsen 2015.
607 *ÆDVÞEN ME AG AGE HYO DRIHTEN / DRIHTEN HINE AÞERIE ÐE ME HIRE ÆTFERIE / BVTON HYO ME SELLE HIRE AGENES ÞILLES*; see Aedwen Brooch (British Museum 1951,1011.1); See also Thornbury 2001.
608 See Ramey 2013, 341–343.
609 See *Ascension*, 19–21; on spiritual ring-giving resembling political or amatory ring-exchange, see *Deutsche Kaiserchronik*, 13067–13376; Boccaccio 1992, I.3; Song 42 of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, 160–163, see also http://csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/index.php?p=poemdata_view&rec=42 (last accessed: 30. 05. 2019).
610 See Okasha 1993, 62–67. There is evidence of inscribed Insular chalices, such as the Tassilo Chalice kept at Kremsmünster Abbey, Austria. See Webster 1991, 168. For a connection between the concepts of materiality articulated in first-person inscriptions on Anglo-Saxon rings and the *Exeter Riddles*, see Tiffany 2001, 72–74; Dale 2017, 66f.; Ramey 2013, 344–346.
611 "*hring*" and "*béah*", in: Bosworth-Toller 2010, http://www.bosworthtoller.com/019780 and http://www.bosworthtoller.com/003091 (last accessed: 22. 01. 2019). See also Okasha 1993, 63f.
612 For a discussion of "paten" as a solution that shows the connections between medical, magical and liturgical practices, see Cavell 2017, 133–137.
613 See, for example, the Coventry Ring (British Museum AF.897).
614 See Der Mönch von Salzburg 1972, G11, 179–184.
615 See, for example, *Wigalois*, 9737–9739, 10219f.; Wolfram von Eschenbach 2012, 3,11–19.
616 See the complex brooch in Johann von Würzburg 1970, 12842–12873.
617 See *Wigalois*, 8884–8887.
618 On power, see, for example, Foucault 1982; see also Walker-Bynum 2011, 274f.
619 See Krämer/Cancik-Kirschbaum/Totzke 2012; Krämer 2014.
620 See, for example, Latour 2005, 79–86.
621 See the Alfred Jewel (Ashmolean Museum, AN1836.p135.371).
622 See Fleming 2001, 55; Smith 1908, 260.
623 See, for example, "Riddle 26", *Exeter Anthology* 2000, 303f; see Bitterli 2009, 176f.; Holsinger 2009, 621f.
624 See, for example, *Kudrun*, 398; *Widsith*, 65–102.
625 See *Solomon and Saturn*, 63–65; *Maxims II*, 10–13.
626 See *Die Hochzeit*, 1–7; *Diu Crône*, 11–27, 49–71, 89–139; compare *Wigalois*, 75–89 to Matthew 7:6; Johann von Würzburg 1970, 20–123.
627 See Wittenwiler 2012, 29915–30000; *Der Ring*, 1–14; Konrad von Würzburg 1840, 1–9, 34–43, 94–99.
628 See *Wigalois*, 10556–10576, 769–791.
629 Cf. Kohl 2003, 236f. Pomian 1990 offers a comprehensive history of the cabinet of curiosities from 1500 to 1800.

630 Macdonald 2006, 84 locates this turn in the seventeenth century, while Kohl 2003, 241–244 focusses on the eighteenth century.
631 Daston 2004, 24.
632 Cf. Zytaruk 2011, 2f. for an analysis of the paradoxes that position the early cabinets between different epistemologies.
633 See Fleck 1846. All translations are mine.
634 Malory 1968, 706. Cf. Ship of Faith episode in *La Queste del Saint Graal*, 195–280. For an English translation, see Comfort's *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, 161–225. For Malory's version, see 703–723 in Vinaver's edition of the Winchester manuscript. Vinaver's edition highlights inscriptions by using up-percase letters. Interestingly, Malory's relatively faithful translation of his French source omits a fascinating detail: the *Queste del Saint Graal* specifies that the ship's inscription is written in Chaldean.
635 Malory 1968, 708.
636 See Michael Ott's discussion of this episode in the chapter on weapons in this volume.
637 See Tiller 2004. For more on the French sources see Iris Roebling-Grau's and Sascha A. Schultz' chapter on tombs in this volume.
638 See Cawsey 2001, 90.
639 Malory 1968, 713f.
640 Cawsey 2001, 90.
641 Quinn 1965, 194f.
642 See discussions of this material in Christine Neufeld's and Ricarda Wagner's chapter on British literature and Sascha A. Schultz' chapter on stone in this volume.
643 Malory 1968, 873.
644 Konrad von Würzburg 1858. The translation is mine.
645 All translations by Edwards 2004. The German text reads: *daz seil was wol zwelf klâfter lanc, die von vier varwe bortesîden wâren*, […] *an ein ander geworht mit gezierde* (Wolfram von Eschenbach 2003, 144,2–4).
646 *zwischen den ringen, ûzen unt innen kôs man dran schrift* […]. *Smaragede wâren die buochstabe, mit rubînen verbundet. adamant, krisolîte, grânât dâ stuonden* (Wolfram von Eschenbach 2003, 146,1–147,2).
647 *daz seil einem fürsten durch minne wart gesant* (Wolfram von Eschenbach 2003, 151,1f.).
648 Wandhoff 2012, 41.
649 Wandhoff 2012, 42.
650 Gottfried von Straßburg 2004. The translation is mine.

651 Cf. Lieb/Ott 2016, 277f. For further reading, esp. all features of the Grail and practices related to the Grail cf. Bumke 20048, 135–142, and more generally Mertens 2003.
652 Cf. Strohschneider 2014, 42–57.